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SORDELLO

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BY

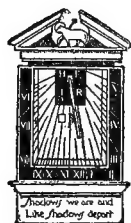
ROBERT BROWNING

EDITED BY

THE REV. ARTHUR J. WHYTE, M.A.

GOLD MEDALLIST AND SENIOR MODERATOR IN HISTORY

IN THE UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN



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PREFACE

THE following edition of *Sordello* is an attempt to treat the poem from a critical and historical standpoint. As far as I am aware no previous edition has been published upon these lines. There are many essays upon the poem, some of which are of great value ; there are also a variety of " notes " in book form and at least one elaborate exposition of the whole poem.¹ None of these efforts seem to be quite what the poem requires. They all have the disadvantage of excluding the text, so that to study the poem two books or more are needed at the same time. The present edition aims at combining both text and notes on the same lines as the plays of Shakespeare are treated in critical editions. That *Sordello* is worthy of serious critical study no student of Browning will gainsay, but even a well-equipped reader will admit that it makes very exceptional demands in the way of historical knowledge. Three objects have been kept in view : to explain the historical allusions, to separate what is historical from what is imaginative, and to simplify the confusion of the text by means of side-notes. With regard to this last point, the extreme difficulty of finding one's way about the poem and often of identifying the speaker make such treatment imperative. The difficulty about

¹ Mr Duff, in his *Exposition of Sordello*, has translated the entire poem into prose, and added many explanations and notes, to which, in the elucidation of obscure passages, I have often been much indebted. The most helpful of the essays on the poem are those of Mr J. T. Nettleship, Dean Church, and Mr Stopford A. Brooke.

Notes signed "D." are taken from Mr Duff's work.

the foot-notes, where not simply historical, has been one of proportion. A running commentary is objectionable, and to indicate the meaning in a few words almost impossible. In many places I have thought it best to avoid comment altogether rather than be tempted into too much paraphrase. It is to be hoped that in giving the extracts from the sources in the original confusion has not been made worse confounded, but in a critical edition it is necessary to be exact. I should here like to express my sense of obligation to Sir Frederic Kenyon and the Rev. Philip Wicksteed for their kindness in reading the work in manuscript, and for much helpful and suggestive criticism. To the late Professor Edward Dowden, also, I owe a very real debt of gratitude. The keen interest, I might almost say enthusiasm, shown in his letters to me after reading the work, will be a memory I shall always cherish with peculiar pride.

I am indebted to the courtesy of Messrs Smith Elder for permission to use the latest revised text.

ARTHUR J. WHYTE

RODLEY, LEEDS, 1913

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THE CHARACTERS

GHIBELLINES.

The Emperor Frederic II.
Ecelin da Romano (the Monk).

His wives—

Agnes Este (dead), mother of
Palma.

Adelaide, mother of Ecelin
and Alberic.

Taurello Salinguerra. His wife
Retrude and son Sordello.

Count Mainard.

Tito, the Imperial Pretor.

Elcorte, an archer, reputed
father of Sordello.

GUELF.

The Pope Honorius III.
Azzo VII. of Este
Richard, Count of San Bonifacio
Montelungo, the Papal Legate.

LIST OF EVENTS AND DATES IN *SORDELLO*

Birth of Ecelin the Monk	. 1150 A.D.
Birth of Ecelin the Tyrant	} 1194 A.D.
Expulsion from Vicenza	
Battle of Ponte Alto and death of Azzo VI. and Richard of San Bonifacio (Elder)	. 1212 A.D.
Death of Adelaide	} 1221 A.D.
Retirement of Ecelin to Oliero	
Sack of Palace of Salinguerra at Ferrara	
Capture of Richard at Ferrara	. 1224 A.D.
The League renewed	. 1226 A.D.
Death of Ecelin the Monk	. 1234 A.D.
Capture of Salinguerra at Ferrara	. 1240 A.D.
Death of Salinguerra at Venice	. 1245 A.D.
Death of Ecelin the Tyrant	. 1258 A.D.
Death of Alberic and Family	. 1260 A.D.

HOUSE OF ROMANO

Arpo

Ecelo = Gisla

d. 1091

Ecelo = Aica

d. 1154

Alberico = Cunizza

d. 1154 (*circa*)

Ecelino = Auria da Baone

(The Stammerer)

d. 1234

Yvanni = Beatrice da Baone

Ecelin = (i) Agnes Este = (ii) Speronella = (iii) Cecilia da = Adelalde da

Cunizza = Tiso da Campo-sampiero

Gisla

Palma

Agnes

a Novella m.

Emilia m.

sophia =

(i) Henry of Egna

(ii) Taurello Salin-guerra

1. Giglia San Bonifacio

2. Selvaggia

3. Isotta Lancia

4. Beatrice

Castelnuovo

Alberico = (i) Beatrice D'Este (ii) Margherita

Alberico d. 1260

Cunizza = 1. Richard b. 1198 San Bonifa

2. Sordello Viscon

3. Bonio da Trev

4. Rainerio da Braganza

5. A Veronese Signor

Giovanni Adelalde Amabilia Griseida Tornalasco

Alberico Romano Ugolino Ecelino Tornalasco

Characters in heavy type mentioned in "Sordello."

THE HOUSE OF SALINGUERRA

(From Frizzi's *Historia di Ferrara*)

Pietro Torelli, alive in 1083 and in 1119 A.D.

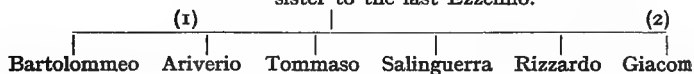
Salinguerra, alive in 1120, dead in 1163

(Ludovico ?) Torello, alive in 1164, dead in 1195

Salinguerra II., born about 1160, died 1245

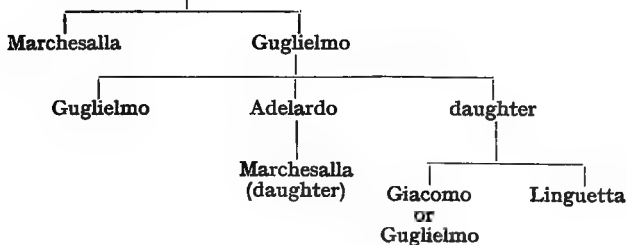
Married (i) Retrude

(ii) Sofia, widow of Henry of Egna and
sister to the last Ezzelino.



HOUSE OF ADELARDI

Bulgaro



INTRODUCTION

(1) *SORDELLO* was published in 1840, when Browning was in his twenty-eighth year. It had been preceded by *Pauline* (1833), *Paracelsus* (1835), and *Strafford* (1837), together with a few short occasional pieces mostly contributed to magazines. It was revised by Browning a quarter of a century later for the three-volume edition of his works published by Smith Elder in 1863.

Abstruse as the subject is, Browning's poem is not absolutely unique, for, curiously enough, in 1837, at the very time our poet was engaged upon his work, there appeared two volumes of *Plays and Poems*, by Mrs William Busk, of which the most pretentious was *Sordello*, a poem of 2000 lines in rhymed tetrameter verse.¹

(2) How the subject came to him we are not told, but it is evident from the poem itself that it was the study of Dante which suggested it to his mind. *Sordello* appears as the guide of Virgil and Dante in the sixth canto of the *Purgatorio*. There are, however, but very slight indications of anything that directly suggests Browning's hero. He is represented as standing alone, which, as in the case of Saladin and our own Henry III., signifies in Dante that in life he was conspicuously unlike others, and he is further alluded to as "tutta in sé romita," "all wrapt in self," "self-absorbed." Apart from these two very slight hints there is nothing that suggests that Browning was indebted to Dante for more than the bare name and idea of *Sordello*'s personality.

But although the *Sordello* of Browning's pencil is a very different figure from that drawn by Dante, yet in spirit there is a close similarity. The fundamental

¹ Professor Hall Griffin suggests that the publication of Mrs Busk's poem may have been the cause of Browning's wide divergence from the lines of the historical *Sordello*. See *Life of Browning*, p. 92.

idea of the Sordello of the *Purgatorio* is of one to whom success came at last after a life of failure. This Browning retained, and for it, as he afterwards tacitly acknowledged, he was indebted to Dante. In a letter written to Miss Barrett, some years later, the following passage occurs: "Yesterday I was reading the *Purgatorio*, and the first speech of the group of which Sordello makes one struck me with a new significance, as well describing the man and his purpose and fate in my poem—see; one of the burdened, contorted souls tells Virgil and Dante—

"Noi fummo gia tutti per forza morti
E peccatori infin' all' ultim' ora
Quivi-lume del ciel ne fece accorti;
Sì chè, pentendo e perdonando, fora
Di vita uscimme a Dio pacificati
che del disio de se veder n'accora";

which is just my Sordello's story. Could I "do" it offhand I wonder—

"And sinners were we to the extreme hour
Then light from heaven fell, making us aware
so that repenting us and pardoned, out
Of life we passed to God, at peace with him
who fills the heart with yearning Him to see."

Apart from Sordello there are various other traces of Dante's influence in the poem. In the sixth book Browning identifies Palma with the Cunizza of the *Paradiso*. Dante's championship of this remarkable woman is somewhat difficult to explain, but perhaps the reputed piety of her later life was the factor which assured her place in Paradise combined with the natural sympathy Dante would feel towards one whose destiny was to love not wisely but too well. This is the explanation she herself offers to Dante.

"Cunizza fui chiamata, e qui refulgo
perche me vinse il lume d'esta stella!"

Somewhat of the same note is found in Browning's lines on Palma, where he says—

"success
concerned not Palma, passion's votaress."

¹ *Letters of Robert and Elizabeth Barrett Browning*, vol. i.

Again, the passage in the second book, where Sordello is pictured "hammering out" a new language for himself the better to express his thoughts, recalls Dante's tribute to Sordello as one of the founders of the Italian speech (*De vulgari eloquentia*, Bk. i.). This same passage most likely inspired the portrait of Sordello as Dante's forerunner (Bk. i. 350)—

"Sordello, Thy forerunner, Florentine!"

(3) The reception which was accorded to *Sordello* when it appeared early in 1840 was hardly an encouragement to its author. The press notices were few and brief; but Browning was already getting used to unsympathetic treatment from this quarter, and it does not seem to have troubled him. But even to those of his friends who were most enthusiastic *Sordello* seems to have come as a great disappointment.

Harriet Martineau was so utterly unable to understand it that she supposed herself ill. Carlyle made sarcastic remarks on the subject, declaring that his wife had read it through without being able to make out whether Sordello was a man or a city or a book.

Walter Savage Landor wrote: "I only wish he (*i.e.* Browning) would Atticize a little. Few of the Athenians had such a quarry on their property, but they made better roads for the conveyance of their material!"

Alfred Domett, to whom Browning sent a copy, protested that Browning was "difficult on system," and received a characteristic reply that the difficulty was due to his living and writing by himself and forgetting that others could not "comprehend his comprehensions" as clearly as he did himself.¹

The criticism of Browning's friends and contemporaries was just. No amount of editing can make *Sordello* easy reading, but it is perhaps possible to render it more intelligible than it appears at first to be.

(4) If the poem is still a genuine difficulty in an age which is comparatively familiar with Browning's idiom, it may well have appeared utterly unintelligible to the reading public of 1840. Edmund Gosse, in his *Personalia*, has the following passage describing the state into which

¹ See Kenyon's *Robert Browning and Alfred Domett*, p. 28.

poetry had fallen at that time: "In 1838 the condition of English poetry was singularly tame and namby-pamby. Tennyson's voice was only heard by a few. The many delighted in poor 'L. E. L.,' whose sentimental 'golden violets' and gushing *improvisatores* had found a tragic close at Cape Coast Castle. Among living poets the most popular were good old James Montgomery, droning on at his hopeless insipidities and graceful 'goodnesses'; the Hon. Mrs Norton, a sort of soda-water Byron, and poor rambling T. K. Hervey. . . . These virtuous and now almost forgotten poetasters had brought the art of poetry into such disesteem with their puerilities and their diluted sentiment that verse was beginning to be considered unworthy of exercise by a serious or original thinker!"

It was no wonder that a public fed on "thin soup" of this type should find *Sordello* a form of nourishment which it had neither the inclination nor the physical capacity to digest.

(5) The difficulties which the reader experiences upon first reading *Sordello* arise mainly from two causes: first, there are those due to the nature of the subject itself and to the intricacies of the period in which the action is placed; and, secondly, there are those which have their origin in the poet's method of treatment, structural and textual. With regard to the first of those, it is obvious that a poem whose action is confessedly psychological must on the face of it be less interesting to the majority of readers than a romance of the usual kind. The average reader does not turn to poetry to read psychological analysis. A spiritual crisis is not as absorbing as a physical one. Matters are not improved when the setting is placed in one of the most difficult and intricate periods of modern history, with which we can only be tolerably conversant after considerable study. Yet this is what every reader of *Sordello* has to face, and Browning's own equipment for the task only makes it more difficult.

(6) It has been pointed out that Browning's obscurity is very often the result of his very grasp of the subject, and this is conspicuously true of *Sordello*. Browning was full to overflowing of information. It was all quite clear to him. Names of people and places and events

that no one has ever heard of were stored in his amazing memory, and take their places in his pages as naturally as if he had lived among them. He gives us no explanations, just as if everyone else were as well informed as he was himself. This has to be borne in mind, for it often happens that the sudden intrusion of some character sets the reader wondering who this is and what he has to do with the story, when, as a matter of fact, he is just dragged in out of the poet's brain merely to add vividness to the scene. There are numerous examples of this throughout *Sordello*: Bianca, Lucio, Pilio, and Bernardo are people who appear for this purpose, and disappear at once. Another difficulty arises from the want of perspective. The historical and psychological aspects are not kept in proportion. The historical background frequently intrudes into the foreground, and, in consequence, what should only be of secondary interest takes the first place. In the same way the prominence given to Salinguerra often obscures Sordello and makes us forget who is the leading character. This want of perspective is even more conspicuous in regard to the time unities in the poem. It begins in the middle, and then, after a few hundred lines, the action suddenly goes back thirty years and proceeds to trace the history across the interval. The first book occupies the first twenty years of Sordello's life, the second gives us the next ten, and the rest of the poem, after passing over very briefly the few months of Sordello's retirement at Goito, records the history of three days! The digression in the middle of the third book will be considered elsewhere; it is sufficient to mention here that Browning suddenly leaves Sordello and his history altogether and gives us a disquisition on the proper function of a poet, and much besides, which extends to nearly five hundred lines, and that without any break in the text and with no further explanation of what is happening than an overloaded simile about his "transcendental platan" (*i.e.* the poem), and the cryptic remark that it were good his soul "were suffered go o'er the lagoon."

(7) Apart from the difficulties of form and matter, *Sordello* presents difficulties of style which are as great as, if not greater than, anything he ever wrote. The first and most conspicuous of these is abnormal condensation.

This is due in part to Browning's natural style; for he wrote very quickly, revised lightly, and wrote just as he thought. His letters to his wife are in some places a kind of literary shorthand, and his poems have something of the same character. In the particular case of *Sordello* this natural tendency was deliberately accentuated by a somewhat foolish and unnecessary criticism of *Paracelsus* as "verbose." "Mr John Sterling," says Mrs Orr, "had made some comments on the wording of *Paracelsus*; and Miss Caroline Fox, then quite a young woman, repeated them, with additions, to Miss Haworth, who in her turn communicated them to Mr Browning, but without making quite clear to him the source from which they sprang. He took the criticism much more seriously than it deserved, and condensed the language of this his next important publication into what was nearly its present form." As an example of the confusion caused in this way we may instance the lines in Bk. iii. 12—

" Woven of painted byssus, silkiest
Tufting the Tyrrhene whelk's pearl-sheeted lip."

Taken by itself the second line reads as if "Tufting" was a verb and that a substantive should be supplied for "silkiest," but "Tufting" is the substantive with the possessive case omitted, and the line should read—

" silkiest
Tufting (of the) Tyrrhene's whelk's pearl-sheeted lip."

Another passage (l. 34) gives us an even better example—

" Sordello well or ill
is finished : then what further use of will,
Point in the prime idea not realized,
An oversight ? inordinately prized
No less, and pampered with enough of each
delight to prove the whole above its reach."

Here Browning omits to give us the key to the whole passage, which is what the "prime idea" was, leaving it to be deduced by the reader from the previous line. He also omits to say clearly that "his will" (which is the prime idea) has failed. Expanded, it means that "In the prime idea, which was to move mankind simply by his Will, he omitted the possibility of its failing ;

which was certainly a point not realized, an oversight. He had prized his will inordinately, and now it has failed, he sees how the very degree of success which it obtained in isolated cases should have shown him that success on a large scale was hopeless. His successes were exceptions which should have proved to him the rule of failure, but did not." All through the poem this expansion has to be made by the reader, and unfortunately it is only familiarity with the story generally which gives us facility in so doing.

Another cause of confusion which cannot be avoided is Browning's weakness for parentheses. These are sometimes explanatory of the situation, sometimes additional detail added, and sometimes comments either by the crowd or by Browning himself criticizing the action of the speaker. Some of these will be found indicated either in the margin or in the notes, but they are too numerous to instance, and all that can be done is to warn the reader to be ready for them.

(8) It may be well here to warn the reader also against trying to read too much into the text. Browning's use of allusions, names, and bits of out-of-the-way information have often enough very little significance.

It would have been well if he had removed many of these, but as he did not, we may take it that this is an intrinsic feature of his style and accept it as such.

Take, for example, the lines in Bk. vi. 140—

" Next half month lacks
mere sturdy exercise of mace and axe
To cleave this dismal brake of prickly pear
which bristling holds Cydippe by the hair
Lames barefoot Agathon !"

The names here sound like some classical allusion, and there is a tale of Cydippe and Acontius which tells how Acontius, falling in love with Cydippe and unable to win her, threw her an apple with some verses inscribed declaring his passion. Cydippe having read them, was held to be bound thereby, and married him. It is obvious to anyone who reads the passage that Browning's allusion has nothing to do with this story, and that he has simply used the names as typical figures to add life to his picture. The use of strange names of this kind is common with Browning ; he picked them up in his

reading and kept them by him for use without any definite reference to the sources from which they came. "Strojavacca," "Dularete," "Tagliafer" all occur in Verci's *Storia degli Ecelini*, but in connections which have nothing to do with the poet's use of them in *Sordello*. Sufficient research would probably reveal the sources of all his strange incidental characters in the same way.

(9) A word should be said regarding the similes throughout the poem. When a simile occurred to Browning's mind he had the faculty of seeing the whole scene at once and complete, down to the minutest detail. While this power gives extraordinary vividness to the picture, it led to much overloading of the text. Literature differs from painting inasmuch as it is not possible to get the same perspective in matters of detail. Words cannot be made to give a sense of distance or smallness, and in consequence everything appears on the canvas the same size. The result with Browning is either that the simile is much too long or that it is too full of detail, and in consequence confusing. Take the description of *Sordello* expanding once more in nature's arms—

"He expanded to himself again
As some thin seedling spice tree starved and frail
Pushing between cat's head and ibis' tail
Crusted into the porphyry pavement smooth.
Suffered remain just as it sprang, to soothe
The Soldan's pining daughter, never yet
well in her chilly green glazed minaret
When rooted up the sunny day she died,
And flung into the common court beside
Its parent tree."

Here is everything. The girl, her health, parentage, home and death, down to the pattern on the pavement and the weather on the day of her decease, as well as the life story of the seedling itself, with sidelights on the character of the gardener and the Soldan himself, all in under ten lines. It is like one of Gerard Dow's interiors without the perspective, and suffers in consequence in being too full and difficult to grasp in reading.

While this offers us a good example of the concentrated simile, those of the sailor in Bk. iii. and the Ethiopian

king in Bk. v. afford examples of similes which are too long drawn out, so that the reader's mind forgets the subject of which the simile is meant to be illustrative.

The one thing about them is that they can never be forgotten, whether it be that Ethiopian king "offstriding to the mountains of the moon" or the "poor gnome"—

" that cloistered up
In some rock chamber with his agate cup
His topaz rod, his seed pearl, in these few
And their arrangement finds enough to do
For his best art."

(10) The difficulties and faults of *Sordello* are so patent that one is apt to forget its great and undeniable beauties. In the concluding lines of the poem Browning tells us with characteristic obscurity of method that if read it will leave behind an "after-gust" due to the "savour's rareness," which, being translated, means that its very strangeness and difficulty will make us want to go back to it again and get at the bottom of it. Not only is this true, but even a first reading reveals beauties unsurpassed by anything he wrote afterwards. Not only are the descriptions of the places and people incomparable, but we get priceless lines and couplets that become a joy for ever to the discoverer, but which at present lie like gems embedded in an untouched soil. Whole books have been written on Browning void of a single line from *Sordello*, and the only couplet that seems to have emerged into the public ken occurs in the first five hundred lines—

" New pollen on the lily petal grows
And still more labyrinthine buds the rose."

It may perhaps stimulate readers to verify the truth as to the treasures of *Sordello* if we quote a few lines here and there. What could surpass, for instance, this picture of the Dragon-fly—

" Flittered in the cool some azure damsel-fly
Born of the simmering quiet, there to die,"

or this of an early morning—

" The breezy morning fresh
above, and merry, all his waving mesh
Laughing with lucid dewdrops rainbow-edged."

Single lines such as—

- “ The tempter of the everlasting steppe,”
 “ The blind night seas without a saving star,”
 “ Richard, light-hearted as a plunging star,”

passages of pure lyrical beauty, abound in every book and are too numerous to quote. We will give two examples, that of Sordello returning from Mantua heartbroken and disappointed, but now once more feeling the magic influence of his kindly nurse, nature, and one of Sordello's pictures of what might have been, a life of simple idyllic love.

- (1) “ Come home Sordello ! soon
 was he low muttering beneath the moon
 of sorrow saved, of quiet evermore
 How from his purposes maintained before
 only resulted wailing and hot tears.”
- (2) “ Not any strollings now at even close
 Down the field-path Sordello ! by thorn rows
 alive with lamp-flies, swimming spots of fire
 and dew, outlining the black cypress' spire
 She waits you at, Elys, who heard you first
 Woo her, the snow month through, but ere she durst
 Answer 'twas April. Linden-flower-time-long
 Her eyes were on the ground ; 'tis July strong
 Now : and because white dust clouds overwhelm
 The woodside, here or by the village elm
 That holds the moon, she meets you, somewhat pale,
 But letting you lift up her coarse flax veil
 And whisper (the damp little hand in yours)
 of love, heart's love, your heart's love that endures
 Till death.”

The portraits in *Sordello* form a gallery by themselves, from Sordello on his first appearance

“ A slender boy in a loose page's dress,”

And Salinguerra, of whom we are told—

“ Men understood
 Living was pleasant to him as he wore
 His careless surcoat, glanced some missive o'er
 Propped on his truncheon in the public way,”

down to the lesser characters such as the Legate Montelungo—

" The Legate, look !
 With eyes, like fresh blown thrush eggs on a thread
 Faint blue and loosely floating in his head
 Large tongue, moist open mouth : "

And besides this we have various examples of that rapid characterization which like a pencil caricature picks out a personality in half a dozen words. Adelaide "the meagre Tuscan," "Strojovacca," who "looks asquint the fat rough sloven," and many others scattered throughout the poem.

It would be easy to go on multiplying examples illustrating every aspect of Browning's art, but such would be out of place. One point there is which readers should notice and that is Browning's command of "atmosphere." As instances, the opening of the last book breathing a sense of almost unearthly peace which quite unwittingly prepares us for the passing of Sordello, almost as if the book were headed with Spenser's lines—

" Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas
 Ease after warre, death after life, does greatly please."

In contrast take Salinguerra's description of the expulsion from Vicenza which sounds as if they were his thoughts ejaculated between his breaths as he fights. As we read we feel that it gives us exactly what passed through his mind wedged in between cut and thrust. The contrast between the autumn stillness in Verona and the scene of wild excitement in the square is another passage. The reader can find many others for himself.

(11) We have the authority of Mrs Orr for the statement that the subject once chosen, Browning read no less than thirty volumes upon it in the British Museum. It would be necessary to have a list of these books and many more besides to verify and explain all the allusions in the poem. The work, however, which undoubtedly gave Browning the greatest assistance was the three volumes of Verci's *Storia degli Ecelini*.¹ From this

¹ Published at Venice in 1770. The introduction contains a study of the origin of the family and an examination of the authorities. Vol. i. traces the private affairs of the family, their alliances and histories. The rest of the work is devoted to their public life and the part they played in the affairs of Lombardy. The work contains also many extracts from con-

he drew the main historical facts upon which he lays stress, the expulsion of the Vivaresi from Vicenza in 1194 and the story of the capture of Count Richard of San Bonifacio by Taurello Salinguerra at Ferrara in 1224. But besides this, as Professor Hall Griffin points out, he found in this work most of those historical details which give to *Sordello* such a suggestion of intimate knowledge of the period.

But Browning was not content with mere second-hand knowledge, for there is plain evidence that he studied the chronicles consulted by Verci for himself. That he read, for instance, the *Parva Chronica Ferrariensis* is plain from the passage in Bk. vi. l. 677, where he quotes the blind chronicler who noted this obscure woe—

“ Of Salinguerra’s sole son Giacomo
Deceased fatuous and doting, ere his sire,”

which is little better than a translation of the passage on the death of “*Jacobus Salinguerra quoque ejus unicus filius jam in aetate factus amicis erat moerari gaudio inimicis utpote fatuus et delirus.*”¹

From the same source he drew the incident of the kidnapping of Linguetta, altering it to suit himself, for whereas Browning makes Linguetta the daughter of Marchesalla, the last of the Adelardi, the chronicler tells us that the last of the family was Guglielm, all of whose direct heirs were dead except a girl, Marchesalla, whom he handed over to Torello Salinguerra (the father) at the age of seven to be kept by him until old enough to marry his son Taurello, on the condition that if there were no children by their union one half of the property should be divided between the two children

temporary authors and a variety of documents. For Browning’s indebtedness to Verci, see *Notes* on Bk. i. 245, 462; Bk. ii. 916; Bk. iv. 32, 41, 345, 608, 682, 736; Bk. v. 286; Bk. vi. 663, 690.

¹ Verci also says “*Ebbe Sophia da Salinguerra un figlio solo di nome Jacobo,*” and adds that he went to Venice with his father when captured at Ferrara, but obtained his liberty and joined his uncle Ecelin’s court at Padua. Browning, however, says Sophia had five children (vi. 681). Frizzi, in his *History of Ferrara*, gives five children by Retrude and one by Sophia, Giacomo. If this is correct, Browning altered the facts to suit his own version of the story, giving right numbers but wrong mothers.

of his sister, "Joculum et Linguetam" and that the other half should go to the hospital of St John of Jerusalem.¹

The account of the final capture of Salinguerra by Venice and the allies in 1240 detailed in Bk. vi.,

"She captured him in his Ferrara, fat
and florid at a banquet, more by fraud
Than force, to speak the truth,"

is an echo of Riccobaldi Ferrariensis, who gives a full account of the whole incident, whereas in the majority of the chronicles it is summed up in a few lines and no mention made of the banquet. This passage gives us a good example of Browning's method. The story is told at some length in Verci, who gives Riccobaldi as his authority.

Este in alliance with Alberic da Romano (at this time bitterly opposed to his brother), and with a large force of Bolognese under the legate Gregorio da Montelungo, and aided by a fleet from Venice under the Doge Jacopo Tiepolo, besieged Taurello for four months in Ferrara without result. Then they tried deceit. They contrived to bribe his Lieutenant Ugo da Ramberti, at whose suggestion, and probably against his own judgment, Taurello accepted their safe conduct and went to the enemy's camp to make terms. These having been agreed upon, under pretence of seeing him safe they escorted him back to Ferrara, and there, says Verci, "under various pretexts put him in prison."

Browning was not satisfied with Verci's account and read Riccobaldi, who tells us how Salinguerra on their return made them a feast in Ferrara, at which the faithless Ugo da Ramberti began to accuse him in vehement language of all kinds of crimes. Taurello replied with heat, and his guests alleging the seriousness of such charges called in their troops and took him prisoner. Salinguerra, seeing the trap into which he had fallen, bowed to the inevitable and was deported to Venice.

¹ Adelardus frater ejus et filii Adelardi omnes praeter filiam, infantem nomine Marchesallem migraverunt e seculo. Guglielmus cum prole careret sibi heredem instituit M. in parte patrimonii ea conditione. . . . eam suam heredem nondum septennem Taurello adversae partis Principi tradiit, ejus filii sponsam futuram. See notes on i. 156; iv. 36, 91; vi. 675.

He died five years later, and was accorded a magnificent public funeral.¹

Another work which Browning made use of was the *Chronicon Estense*, from which he drew the burning of the Salinguerra palace "et tunc expulsi fuit pars Dom. Salinguerra de Ferraria et combusta domus sua." From this work comes also the source of the lines—

"Some grey scorching Saracenic wine
The Kaiser quaffs with the Miramoline."

For in a notice of the expulsion of the Moors from Spain in 1228 he mentions the "potentia Regis Africæ qui dicitur Miramolinus," though the same word spelt "Mamolinus" is also found in the *Chronicon Monachi Paduani*.

What Browning seems to have done was to take as his main sources Verci and Sismondi's *Italian Republics*, and to consult the authorities quoted by them for additional or special knowledge. Sismondi, for instance, quotes Pigna's *Historia Principi di Este* as giving a very untrustworthy account of the struggle between Ecelin and Azzo. Browning, looking it up, drew from it a hint for the lines descriptive of the origin of Este—

"Atii at Rome while free and consular
Este at Padua who repulsed the Hun" (i. 286),

for Pigna opens his history by deriving the family from a certain Caio Atio, the father of another Caio Atio, and described as "Decurione et Principe di Este." Then he traces the family down to his own time, dwelling at great length on the Hunnish invasion of Italy under Attila and the defence of Padua and Aquileia, in which the Este of that day is said to have taken a leading part.

Another passage which may probably be traced to Browning's study of the same author is a couplet referring to the youth of Salinguerra—

"Anon the stripling was in Sicily
Where Heinrich ruled in right of Constance" (iv. 512).

None of the usual authorities mention this journey at all: in fact, they give us very little information as to

¹ See Riccobaldi "*De obsidione Ferrariae*." Note on vi. 731.

Salinguerra's personal history, but Pigna tells us that after the marriage of Azzo with Marchesalla (*i.e.* Linguetta), Adelardi, Salinguerra, perceiving that he was made equal with the rest of the citizens and not being able to stand it, transferred himself in the year 1190 to Cæsar in Sicily, to whom he complained of the pride of Azzo, and so forth. Incidentally we may mention that Pigna omits all about the abduction of Linguetta, making it appear quite an ordinary marriage, for the Este in his eyes could do no wrong.¹

There is not much in Rolandino that Browning could not have found equally well in Verci, if we except the lines descriptive of the founder of the House of Romano—

“ The first knight
Who followed Conrad hither in such plight
His utmost wealth is summed in his one steed,”

which is obviously drawn from the passage describing how Ecelin made friends with the Paduans by pledging his fief of Onara “quem olim Ecelinus avus ejus habuerat ab Rege Corrado cum quo venerat de Alemannia ab uno equo.”

But he may have drawn it equally well from Verci, who quotes it in his introduction.²

Rolandino is to be found in vol. viii. of *Muratori (Rerum Script. Ital.)*, together with the other contemporary chroniclers. As the notes on the text will show, Browning seems to have consulted them all. *The Monk of Padua*³ the *Chronicle of Laurentius*,⁴ the *History of Maurisius*⁵ as well as *Antonio Godi* and the *Life of San Bonifacio*.⁶ Another work which he consulted was the *Vita di Ezzelino* by Pietro Gerardo,⁷ one of the earliest of the Italian sources. Browning also read various articles in the *Biographie Universelle*, and probably gathered from the article on *Sordello* the name of the archer “Elcorte,” who in the poem is the reputed father of Sordello, for in that article it is stated that in one of the biographies of the Poets of Provence it is

¹ See note on Bk. iv. l. 512.

² See also i. 188; iii. 93, 451; iv. 102.

³ iv. 637.

⁵ iv. 225, 635, 682; vi. 702, 710.

⁷ i. 188; v. 775.

⁴ iv. 59; vi. 729.

⁶ iv. 488.

recorded that Sordello was "ne dans le Mantouan d'un pauvre chevalier nomme Elcort."

Besides all this, there lies behind *Sordello* a mass of miscellaneous knowledge on the Middle Ages which it would be almost impossible to locate. His reading for *Paracelsus* would account, no doubt, for some of the allusions, his studies in the classics for others, but there still remains a residuum which will puzzle readers for many a long day to come.¹

(12) It is necessary in order to understand many of the allusions and much of the atmosphere of *Sordello* that the reader should be acquainted more or less with the political and social conditions of Lombardy during the period covered by the poem (1194-1260). For this purpose the Treaty of Constance concluded in 1183 A.D. between the Emperor Frederic I. (Barbarossa) and the cities of Lombardy forms the most convenient starting-point. For many years Frederic Barbarossa had waged bitter war against the cities of Lombardy under the headship of Milan, but eventually he was completely overthrown at the battle of Legnano, 1176 A.D. This victory assured peace, which was finally signed at Constance in 1183 A.D. The Treaty of Constance was the Magna Carta of the Lombard cities. It extended to all the cities of Italy the right to levy armies, to fortify and govern themselves and reduced the sovereignty of the Emperor to the recognition of his overlordship and the right to levy an annual contribution for Imperial purposes. The effect of their hard-won liberty was to alter in the next half century the whole social conditions of Northern Italy.

Hitherto the country had been governed by Dukes, Marquises, and Counts, who by overawing the peasantry and keeping the cities in impotence, had ensured the predominance of the Imperial interests. But as soon as the cities became self-governing their strength and wealth increased by leaps and bounds. Their city walls kept them safe from marauding barons and their command of money and their military spirit ensured adequate defence in case of serious attack. The nobles were in consequence no longer able to oppose the cities with any chance of success except by elaborate combination or

¹ See Bk. ii. 296 ff. ; iii. 430 ; v. 125, are examples.

where individual fiefs were so large as almost to resemble little kingdoms. The result was that many of the lesser nobility who had hitherto flourished by preying on travelling merchants and unarmed towns found themselves compelled to enroll themselves as citizens or else anxious to do so from policy. For the cities soon became strong enough to sally out and avenge insults upon merchants by burning the castles of the culprits. Many other causes contributed to this union of foes. The cities needed good military leaders, and as their wealth increased and trade prospered their martial spirit declined, and it was found expedient to bring in the nobility to lead their armies, for they were by training and inclination fighters and leaders. On the other hand, the gradual concentration of wealth in the cities impoverished the nobility and made an alliance with the citizens an end much to be desired. So by mutual consent they joined forces. The progress which should have resulted from this union of hitherto jarring elements was, however, quickly neutralized by political events, which ultimately resulted in a fresh and more disastrous cleavage under the familiar party name of Guelf and Ghibelline.

(13) The origin of the famous quarrel which led to the Guelf-Ghibelline struggle lay in the religious reformation of which Pope Hildebrand (Pope Gregory VII.) was the moving spirit, and which took place at the close of the eleventh and beginning of the twelfth century, about a hundred years before the birth of Sordello and Ecelin. Hildebrand set himself to separate the civil and ecclesiastical powers. With this end in view he denied the right of any layman to invest ecclesiastics with the temporalities of their sees. Hitherto, after consecration, the lands attached to the Bishoprics and Abbacies had been handed over to the newly appointed dignitary by the Emperor or other over-lord by a form known as investiture with the ring and crozier. This right had been grossly abused, appointment being often a mere matter of bargaining between the parties as to the price to be paid. On the other hand, such investiture assured feudal loyalty, an important matter to the State, when the Church dignitaries owned large fiefs. The controversy was fought out with terrible bitterness, the

Emperor being excommunicated and the Pope driven from Rome and dying in exile. The victory rested finally with the Church, whose power and influence was vastly increased thereby. Hildebrand set his face not only against lay-investiture, but also against the simony rampant in the Church and against the practice of marriage amongst the clergy, and the shadow of his stern personality falls across the poem, not only in the passage directly dealing with the quarrel about investitures in the fifth book, but also in the story of the ex-monk who relates the tale of Crescentius at the close of Bk. iv.

(14) Shortly before his death Frederic Barbarossa married his only son Henry to Constance, the heiress of the two Sicilies, this latter kingdom comprising Sicily and the greater portion of Italy south of Rome. On the death of Barbarossa the prospect of the union of North and South Italy in the hands of the Emperor alarmed the Pope, whose position would, in case of war with the Empire, be hopeless. He began, therefore, to rally the forces of the Church, and to arouse among the cities of Lombardy a spirit of hostility to the Empire with the cry that the Church was in danger. Before, however, the position became critical, Henry VI. died, leaving one son, Frederic II., a child of four years old. Constance, dying a year later, left her child under the guardianship of the Pope. Thus for a time the almost inevitable outbreak between the Pope and Emperor was postponed. In the meantime, the Lombard communes had enough troubles of their own without taking up the cudgels on behalf of the Papacy. Freed from the necessity of union by any fear of an Imperial invasion, they broke out into wars and squabbles and mutual jealousies among themselves. Their newly acquired allies, the nobility, when once firmly established in the cities, began to display all the lawlessness which had characterized them as independent barons. Their palaces in the cities became fortresses, from which they often enough broke out to plunder and murder the peaceful citizens. When not employed in ravaging some neighbouring city they engaged in broils within their own. The position at last became so unbearable that the city councils adopted the idea of appointing a "Podesta"—that is, a noble selected from some other

city, and given a good salary and full power on condition that he administered justice and kept order. He was appointed, as a rule, for a year, but could be re-elected at the close of each year's service; he had to render an account to the city, and was liable to punishment. The Podesta was supposed to be free from any party bias, but after a time, when the Guelf-Ghibelline struggle was proceeding, he was generally found to be in sympathy with the ruling faction, and often enough was as keen a partisan as anyone else.¹ This resulted in the expulsion of many of the turbulent barons, who were, however, recalled after a time. Broadly speaking, the result was the gradual emergence of rival parties in all the cities, sometimes divided on political, sometimes on religious grounds, only waiting a battle-cry to split Lombardy into fragments. In many cases all the elements of the coming struggle were present through inter-family feuds, due to some one or other of the outrages or insults which greed or jealousy only too frequently caused.

The names Guelf and Ghibelline are of German extraction, and are said to have first been used in the civil war waged in Germany from 1212 to 1218 between Frederic II., backed by the Pope, and his rival Otho IV. The victorious return of Frederic transplanted these terms to Italy, where, in the struggle that followed between Pope and Emperor, they were quickly adopted as the party names, the Guelfs becoming identified with the Church party, while the Imperialists became Ghibellines.

(15) It is almost impossible to get any clear picture of the balance and divisions of parties within the Lombard cities. In each of them were, as a rule, two parties or predominant families in active rivalry; thus Ferrara was divided between the Salinguerra and the Adelardi, and Vicenza between the Maltraversi and the Vivaresi. But matters were complicated by the emergence of the two houses of Romano and Este, who represented respectively Emperor and Pope. They were not confined to any single city, but had powerful influences in several. They both owed allegiance to the Emperor, while, at the same time, the house of Este was the

¹ The Podesta was originally a creation of Frederic Barbarossa after his conquest of Milan.

executive arm of the Church. Their policy was to throw their weight into the scales in any city where an opportunity occurred and try to expel the other side for as long as possible. Thus the balance of power was constantly shifting, but, as a rule, Verona and Vicenza, and later Padua, were subject to Ecelin of Romano, while Ferrara and Mantua, and some other cities not mentioned in *Sordello*, were controlled by the house of Este.

(16) Browning has followed the historical events very closely, and in the main, accurately, though he has not hesitated to invent or to alter facts to suit his purpose and give the poem a definite plot. The action takes place round two historical incidents which may be related in some detail. The first is the expulsion of the Ecelin faction from Vicenza in 1194 A.D., and the second is the capture of Richard, Count Boniface, Este's friend and ally, by Salinguerra, at Ferrara, in 1224.

Vicenza was divided between the Maltraversi, under Count Uguccone, and the Vivaresi, at whose head was Taurello Salinguerra. Behind these two factions lay the lords of Este and Romano, ready to make use of the slightest opening. In June 1194 A.D. it was necessary to select a Podesta, and as the two parties could not agree, they arranged to leave the choice to two nominees, one from either party. The Maltraversi delegated Pilio da Celsano and the Vivaresi, one Sulimano, a judge. Pilio, at the instance probably of Este, without consulting his colleagues, offered the post to Giacomo di Bernardi, a Bolognese, on the condition that, if elected, he would favour the Guelf-Este-Maltraversi party. The conditions having been accepted by Bernardi, Pilio nominated him to Sulimano and contrived his election. Bernardi, when fairly in the saddle, carried out his promise with such unblushing thoroughness that the Vivaresi soon took up arms. Ecelin was called upon, but the Este faction were first in the field, and the whole Ecelin-Vivaresi party were expelled from the city. Browning, for the purposes of the poem, places Ecelin's wife, Adelaide, and her infant son, Ecelin, as well as Retrude, the wife of Salinguerra, and their child, Sordello, all in Vicenza at the time, though this is un-historical. Ecelin, however, was born of Adelaide this very year, probably at Bassano.

Thirty years elapse before the second event takes place, the capture at Ferrara of Richard, Count Boniface, by Taurello Salinguerra. The preliminary events, of which Browning gives a brief summary, may be mentioned here. In 1221, Azzo VII. took the lead of the Guelf party on the death of his elder brother, Aldrobrandino. He was the younger son of the Azzo, who expelled Salinguerra from Vicenza in 1194. He resided chiefly at Ferrara, where Salinguerra was his rival. In the month of August he attacked the Ghibelline faction, who at the moment were in the ascendant in the city, and expelled them, burning the Salinguerra palace. Taurello returned to the attack the following year, and in his turn expelled Azzo. Azzo promptly collected another army, and in due course appeared before Ferrara with all that was necessary to recapture the city either by assault or siege. Taurello resorted to trickery and invited Azzo to enter the city and come to terms peaceably. Azzo fell into the trap, and, accompanied by one hundred nobles, advanced into Ferrara. Taurello, giving as a reason that they had committed excesses and broken faith, attacked them. Azzo and some of his lords forced their way out in safety, but many were slain, including Tisolino da Camposampiero, one of the Azzo's dearest friends. In revenge for this treachery and the death of Tisolino, Azzo made great efforts to collect an overwhelming force for a fresh siege. For this purpose he called to his aid his friend Count Richard of San Bonifacio, and together they once more advanced upon Ferrara. Salinguerra opened negotiations with Count Richard, and so astute was his diplomacy that he induced him to fall into the same trap as he had laid for Azzo the previous year. Richard entered Ferrara with a small body of cavalry and was promptly secured. This was in the year 1224. In the poem the trick played upon Azzo is omitted, and mention is made only of the capture of Richard. It is truly astonishing that in an age of deceit so transparent a trick should be played successfully in the same place in consecutive years. Taurello Salinguerra must have well deserved the description of "*sapiens et astutus*" which Rolandino gives him. Azzo in disgust threw up the siege and vented his wrath upon Taurello's castle of Fratta. The

Lombard League now intervened, and Richard was released the next year.

(17) The death of Adelaide and the retirement of Ecelin into a monastery at Oliero took place while these events were in progress. Browning makes Ecelin's retirement the result of his wife's death, which is at least natural if there is no direct evidence to support it. Oliero, the place to which he retired, is a village about six miles above Bassano, on the river Brenta, and in the territory of Vicenza. Here Ecelin had built a small monastery, which, in 1221 A.D., he made over to the neighbouring Benedictine monastery of Campese, a previous foundation of his own family. The deed stipulates that the prior of Campese shall maintain at Oliero four monks, of whom two are to be in orders. During his life Ecelin was to have the entire administration of the church and convent "in temporalibus." This deed fixes the true place and date of his retirement.¹

It is not necessary to suppose that Ecelin took the monastic vow, or, as Browning intimates, shut himself off entirely from the world upon his entrance into Oliero. There is evidence that on more than one occasion he came out to try and compose the quarrels of his sons, and he certainly kept in touch with outside events by means of letters. An interesting example is preserved by Rolandino, dated 1228 A.D., in which he strongly advises his sons to make peace with the Paduans, and quotes certain verses of their mother Adelaide, who "knew the courses of the stars and the judgments of the planets" foretelling the fate of the family—

"En quia fata parant lacrimosos pandere casus
Gentem Marchixiam fratres abolere potentes
Viderit Axanum, concludent castra Zenonis";

a prediction which had a literal fulfilment, for Browning only records the historical facts when he tells us that it was—

¹ Verci, vol. i. p. 145. "All' anno 1221 sotto il giorno vigesimo secondo de novembre, abbiamo un instrumento di convenzione fra Ecelino e i monaci di Campese. . . . Ecco dunque fissato il tempo di questo suo ritiro, eccone stabilito il luogo."

“ By San Zenon where Alberic in turn
saw his exasperated captors burn
seven children and their mother : then regaled
so far, tied on to a wild horse, was trailed
To death through raunce and bramble-bush ! ”

Retirement of this kind was by no means unusual, for in those days many a life of brawl and battle was ended within the monastery walls, where alone could be offered a semblance of peace in a turbulent and superstitious age, whose two predominant characteristics might be summed up in the words, “ Without were fightings, within were fears.”

(18) With regard to the other historical characters and incidents in the poem, Browning has, as a rule, stuck close to his authorities. The portraits of Salinguerra, Adelaide and Palma are, of course, purely imaginative, but the main facts are historically correct. In drawing the picture of Palma, Browning has combined facts relating to two of Ecelin's daughters, Palma and Cunizza. In making her the sole child of Agnes Este, he has adopted Verci's conclusion. All that is known is that Agnes died in childbirth, and that a certain “ Palma, daughter of Ecelin,” was married to one Valpertino da Cavaso. Another daughter, “ Palma Novella,” Adelaide's eldest child, married Alberto da Baone. Verci comes to the conclusion that the wife of Valpertino was the child of Agnes Este. This result is based partly on the evidence of dates and partly on the fact that the use of the name “ Novella ” implies the existence of another Palma in the same family. Cunizza, the youngest child, was married to Richard of San Bonifacio, but deserted him for Sordello, the Troubadour, and had subsequently two or three more husbands, ending a remarkable career with a life of piety and good works, for which Dante places her in Paradise. Thus Browning's story combines the two sets of facts. Most of the events recorded are correct. The death of Ecelin and Alberic, their marriages, the fate of Salinguerra, the various exploits in which they took part are all historical. The only character which is entirely imaginative and unhistorical is Sordello himself. The truth concerning the historical Sordello is lost in the obscurity of Romance. A good many of his songs

have survived. He is said to have been one of the greatest of Troubadours as well as a knight-errant of marvellous powers. He either married or ran away with Cunizza, the daughter of Ecelin, and had a variety of adventures in love and war. Dante places him amongst those who died a violent death, but there is no further evidence on the point. His influence on Browning's conception is of the slightest, and such evidence as there is throws no light on the poem.

It may be well here to summarize succinctly the historical and unhistorical elements. Broadly speaking, the events and characters mentioned are all historical, while the character drawing is imaginative. To this there is one important exception. Sordello himself is entirely Browning's own creation, and has nothing in common either with the Sordello of Dante or of history. Further, making him the son of Salinguerra, upon which the whole plot turns, is a pure invention and utterly unhistorical. Eglamor and Naddo are likewise the poet's own inventions. Palma, the daughter of Ecelin and Agnes Este, was in all probability an historical person, but her relations with Sordello are imaginative. With regard to the character drawing, Browning made the most of the verdict of history. The popular conception of Adelaide was that of a witch and her attachment to the science of astrology frequently mentioned, and the poet has evolved his character upon these lines. "*Sapiens et astutus*" is the common estimate of Salinguerra, of which Browning has made the most. In the pictures which he gives us of Ecelin the Monk and his two sons there is probably a good deal of exaggeration. It was not until much later in life that the sons became the awful tyrants whose names have become bywords for cruelty, and Verci's estimate of the Monk is by no means unfavourable. The events recorded in the poem are historical; slips occur here and there, but on the whole, as the notes will show, they are astonishingly accurate. Taken as a whole the poem is a tribute to the thoroughness of Browning's method, the depth of his reading, and his wonderful grasp of the time both in its wider issues and in its details.

(19) The oft-quoted sentence in Browning's introduction to the 1863 edition, that the stress of the poem

lay "on the incidents in the development of a soul," gives us the clue to the real purport of *Sordello*. The reader must be prepared to accept this statement as a fact, and to understand that the real action in the poem is psychological, and that it is in this that the interest must be found, and not, as is customary, in the historical incident, which in this case is subsidiary. We have to follow the characters from the inside: it is not what they do, but what they think, that is important.

In this respect *Sordello* is not essentially peculiar among the poet's works, for in Browning, action (*i.e.* deeds), as we normally use the word, is mainly interesting as a revelation of character or as an indication of some peculiar or unusual mental state. It is how a particular character will face some particular problem which fascinates Browning, and in portraying it he gives us not so much what the man does as the welter of motives, reasons, and impulses which originate or determine his conduct. That Browning is not hopelessly dull and unreadable is due not only to his mastery of psychological analysis, but also to his wonderful power in giving us the setting of his problem with the utmost brilliancy of colouring combined with the very minimum of strokes. Browning's mind was essentially analytic. He was a born anatomist. He began his career as a poet with *Pauline*, a piece of ruthless self-dissection, of which John Stuart Mill said: "The writer seems to me to be possessed of a more morbid and intense self-consciousness than I ever knew in any sane human being," and this tendency lasted throughout his life. But with this passion for analysis he combined in early life a keen desire for synthesis, he pulled to pieces only that he might know how to put together again. There is a passage in *Pauline* where this is plainly indicated.

" 'Twas in my plan to look on real life
The life all new to me; my theories
were firm, so them I left, to look and learn
mankind, its cares, hopes, fears, its woes and joys;
And, as I pondered on their ways, I sought
How best life's end might be attained—an end
comprising every joy."

It is this determination to find "how best life's end might be attained—an end comprising every joy" that

gives us the clue to the creation not only of *Sordello*, but also of *Aprile* and *Paracelsus*. Later the craving for the delineation of a perfect yet real man passed away, or, to be more exact, disintegrated, and the poet did some of his finest work in the creation of that gallery of separate types which began with the publication of *Men and Women* in 1855.

(20) It is not a little remarkable that in *Pauline*, which was published when Browning was one-and-twenty, we find the elements of the poet's mature philosophy quite plainly indicated. Power, knowledge, and Love, these are Browning's trinity of fundamentals from which he never departed. All are present in embryo in *Pauline* : *Paracelsus* is a study of knowledge and Love in contrast ; while *Sordello* is from one point of view a study of the negative side of the same problem—that is, of a character, to which these vital influences have been denied. In *Paracelsus*, his first constructive effort, Browning gives us the pursuit of knowledge and Love as life ideals typified respectively in *Paracelsus* and *Aprile*. Both fail : *Paracelsus*, because he mistakes knowledge for the end, whereas it is only the means ; *Aprile*, because, while his instinct for Love is true, he rejects knowledge, the indispensable means. The truth is foreshadowed in the passage where *Paracelsus* exclaims—

“ Are we not halves of one dissevered world ? ”

(21) Two years later, when Browning began to write *Sordello*, he took a different line. The problem which the life and character of *Sordello* brings before us is, what would be the result of putting into the world a being gifted with the highest potentialities, but deprived of all the usual channels of self-development and denied those normal forces which guide, direct, and stimulate the human mind in its most plastic and receptive stage ? So to test this Browning created *Sordello*, a poet and a genius with the highest natural gifts of mind, but deprived of all the essentials of normal development. He is ignorant, motherless, lonely, physically weak, and in an obscure position. He struggles up to manhood without knowledge of the world or its ways, selfish and self-centred, without a moral sense, yet with an intense natural feeling for beauty in all its forms and a . . .

natural disposition at once lovable and loving. Then suddenly on the strength of a chance achievement he finds himself famous and is thrown into the life of Mantua, in the capacity of a Troubadour. For ten years he remains there, alternately worshipped and scoffed at, until at last, lonely, embittered and disappointed, he flies back to the old home at Goito.

(22) To understand Sordello's failure we must appreciate something of his own point of view. The result of his lonely, self-centred childhood, in which physical weakness had cut off the ordinary outlets of youthful energy, had been to stimulate his inventive faculties until they gave him a world of his own in which as king he was undisputed master. He naturally enough conceived of the outside world as being the exact counterpart of his mental one, and firmly expected that when the time came he would be the same prominent figure among real men and women as he was among those of his own creation. He anticipated the same implicit obedience to his will, the same boundless admiration of his talents, the same absence of criticism and complaisant ignoring of mistakes and failures. It was very childish perhaps, but natural. The link in the chain of success which he completely overlooked was the element of opposition. But strong will implies a good deal more than the mere reiteration of a determination ; it means also the faculty of removing difficulties and overcoming obstacles. It must be executive as well as initiative. Sordello ignored the possibility of opposition and omitted in consequence any provision for enforcing his will if its mere enunciation failed. He conceived no more difficulty in achieving his purposes with the outside world than in his own, forgetting that no one of his inner world had ever yet been conceived with a will in direct opposition to his own, whereas every real man has a will which must be either directed or coerced before even elementary obedience is forthcoming. The result of contact with the world was thus a foregone conclusion. So long as Sordello displayed his art along the familiar lines, singing stories and romances, historical or imaginative, admiration was boundless. But as soon as he became didactic and sought to "raise the people" he found himself faced by ridicule, indifference, or active opposition. He had

as yet none of the compelling force of character, such as a St Bernard or a Savonarola possessed, nor had he an executive to enforce compliance such as Church and State had at their disposal, and the inevitable result was to disgust or alienate those who, he fondly imagined, would worship at his feet. This was rendered doubly bitter because the popular attitude towards his art reacted upon their estimate of Sordello himself, and his pride and self-esteem suffered a rude shock. His demand that they should serve and he should rule, in virtue of his will, failed, because his greatness was a mere assertion he could not prove.

(23) Up to this point Sordello's life has been purely egotistic. His aim has been "the life comprising every joy"; his work as Troubadour was directed to this end, the people being the machine by which his will was to be carried out, and their betterment a mere by-product evolved in the process of his own consummation. But fate now brought him to Ferrara and forced upon him what he had never realized before, the idea of service. It was here in the corpse-strewn streets of Ferrara that the appeal of suffering humanity came to him and determined his life's task. It was not so much their actual physical misery, though that was appalling enough, as their acquiescence in their lot, that aroused Sordello. It was the "argumentum e silentio," the fact that they took all their sufferings for granted, without protest or complaint, which gave birth in Sordello to a mighty pity. They were dumb, "inarticulate," to use the expressive word of Carlyle's, and the pride and splendour of their chiefs only threw it all the clearer into relief. Then, like a flash, it came to him: this was his work, he must be the people's spokesman.

From this point Sordello has ceased to be the egotist and has turned altruist. It is well to lay some stress on this point. Sordello has come to himself. In his own words—

" He felt
An error, an exceeding error melt "

—and realized to the full his past life's "outrageous vanity." From this onward, though with sad relapses, the centre of significance in his mental orbit was shifted from

the claims of self to those of others. To us the work done may seem childish (for all he achieved was a long speech before Salinguerra) and his ideal utterly impracticable, but the point is that he was trying, that blindly, maybe even futilely, he was yet working for others. Sordello now knows what his work is, but the further question at once arises how the work is to be done and what is the first step to take. To throw in his lot with either Guelf or Ghibelline would be to narrow his scope and reduce his ideal to the level of ordinary people. He is no partisan. It is humanity he must help, not a mere section. His work must coincide with his sympathies, which are universal.

A short examination of Guelf and Ghibelline ideals *as practised*, shows that both are equally selfish and impossible, but in *theory* the Guelfs have the advantage. The Papal claim is universal, embracing all mankind. It is also spiritual. These are two qualifications which appeal strongly to Sordello, but the difficulty will be to separate the spiritual from the worldly. The dynastic and material aspect of the Church is as alien to Sordello's soul as the Ghibelline ideal.

Is there no "tertium quid"? This Sordello finds at last in the idea of a revival of consular Rome—spiritual but not theological, consular but not dynastic. A kind of new Jerusalem descending out of heaven of which he is to be the *deus ex machina*. Fired at last with hope, and realising that the secular arm must be invoked to aid him, he returns to Salinguerra to win him to his side. The result of his effort, made with all the power and conviction of the poet, but utterly lost on the unimaginative man of action, is—Taurello's offer of the leadership of the Ghibelline party. It is a bribe, a gigantic bribe.

(24) In the struggle which follows the forces of Sordello's soul are ranged into two contending factions. On the one side stand the people, on the other stands self. It is unselfishness versus selfishness, altruism against egotism, the higher against the lower. All that is best in him cries out to resist the bribe. His ideals, his principles are all ranged against Salinguerra's offer. But the forces on the other side are strong. There is the attraction of power, power immediate and immense.

There is his love of Palma, there is the subtle argument that acceptance of the Ghibelline leadership will offer him just the scope he needs for the realization of his ideals. And through all runs the passionate cry of his starved and disappointed soul for "one crowded hour of glorious life." Sordello dies in the struggle, but not before he has trampled the badge beneath his foot, showing thereby that the better part was chosen at the last.

(25) What verdict are we to pass upon *Sordello*? Browning himself has passed none, though it would be easy to pick out isolated sentences in the poem which seem to give judgment both for and against. He has left us to form our own judgment.

" And therefore have I moulded, made anew
A Man, and give him to be turned and tried
Be angry with or pleased at."

Thus in any attempted estimate our verdict will be determined by personal predilections. The simplest, but the shallowest, judgment, is that Sordello is a failure because he "did" nothing. He made no money, won no battles, made no laws. He set out with great ideas, and died before they matured into actions. This is the standpoint of the practical man or woman whose whole estimate of success lies in "doing things," in "action." Most of us worship results which can be seen and tabulated and make a scale of values accordingly. It is Salinguerra whom we admire, one of those—

" Who seeing just as little as you please
yet turn that little to account—engage
with, do not gaze at, carry on a stage
the work o' the world."

Sordello certainly fails when regarded from this standpoint. But to condemn Sordello wholly even upon these grounds is to misapprehend his character as drawn by Browning and also to misinterpret the poet's own idea of what results from human efforts really are. With Browning, to think is to do. Ideas are latent facts which, when once conceived, may be delayed but cannot be prevented from ultimately taking their place as visible realities in the scheme of things.

Ordinary people are like small retail tradesmen, who

borrow their mental stock-in-trade from the manufacturer and live on the small profit made on their sale. But Sordello was a real thinker, who borrowed nothing. He differed fundamentally from Naddo and his confrères, who stand for the ordinary life of educated, thinking men, in the fact that whereas they were constantly drawing conclusions from definite, accepted, but unexamined premisses, Sordello had as yet no premisses at all, and therefore no conclusions either. He was, in short, an original mind, to whom the accepted compromises and conventions of ordinary social thought made no appeal. Acceptance prior to investigation was no part of his creed, he was rather one who only accepted and understood as Truth that which he proved for himself. He was mentally of the type of such men as Abelard and Paracelsus, or Browning's Pietro of Abano. Men before their age, and, in consequence, misunderstood and unappreciated.

Now Browning tells us in Sordello's last speech that these are the men who lay the foundations for human progress. Though they seem to fail and achieve nothing, long after they are dead, perhaps, a later generation germinates the seed they sowed. In the world of thought nothing is lost any more than in the world of nature. It may be dormant and be lost to sight, but it is only awaiting its proper moment to burst forth into renewed activity. It was in advancing social ideas far in advance of his age, in championing the cause of the people in the midst of feudalism, that Sordello's greatness and success lay. Though from man's ordinary standpoint of what success is, Sordello's measure of achievement is a negligible quantity, his was a failure from which the world ultimately gained rather than lost.

The fact should not be lost sight of that Browning makes Sordello anxious and willing to serve the people, but it is the question of How so to do that is his stumbling-block. It is here that his want of education is the true cause of failure. It is education which teaches us *how* to serve; every one is aware of the trouble caused by ignorant would-be helpers, and Sordello was too wise to fling himself blindly into a task without knowing how to carry it through with some chance of success. His instinct was true, for the time was not yet when even

the preliminary steps towards that mighty equilibrium were due to be established. Sordello was not strong enough to combat the forces of the age in which he lived, nor experienced enough to know just what should be done to take the next step forward. Though in one sense the product of his age, in another he was far in advance of his time, and the two sides clashed within him. Some allowance must be made for each of these forces. His amazing egotism and self-confidence was characteristic of his time and gifts. "Love and vanity amongst the troubadours," says Sismondi, "seems by turns to assume such an empire over the feelings as almost to shake the reason." His Utopian idea of a Roman republic governing the world based on the equality of all men was ridiculous in the height of Feudalism. He looked before and after and pined for what was not. But Browning would have us feel nevertheless that his instinct was true, even though it was a nineteenth century ideal clad in the garments of a bygone age.

The other cause of failure not less potent than his ignorance was his want of balance. He was spiritually and æsthetically over-developed. His intuitive perception of the meaning of things was so intense that judgment and action were alike paralysed. Tennyson's "flower in the crannied wall" was an open book to Sordello, but his very knowledge struck him dumb.

" Broke
Morning o'er earth, he yearned for all it woke—
From the Volcano's vapour-flag winds hoist
Black o'er the spread of sea—down to the moist
Dale's silken barley-spikes sullied with rain
Swayed earthwards, heavily to rise again—
The Small, a sphere as perfect as the Great
To the Soul's absoluteness."

In this he reminds us more of Browning's portrait of Lazarus in *An Epistle* than anything else, one of whom it may be said—

" Heaven opened to a soul while yet on earth
Earth forced on a soul's use while seeing Heaven."

This intense sense of spiritual significance in all things must of necessity react adversely upon his possibilities as a man of action. He shrank instinctively from the

sordidness and brutality of political activity and all the mean details of the "vulgar, vast, unobvious work" that was inevitable to the social reformer. There was only one thing that could give him strength to face it, and that was the discovery of a higher Synthesis than his mind had yet perceived, so pure and lofty as to sanctify the meanness of life and hallow the drudgery inevitably entailed. It is here that we may perhaps indicate the religious teaching in the poem which Browning has expressed only in the dimmest possible manner, save in one beautiful passage which must be quoted—

SORDELLO.

"Of a Power above you still
Which, utterly incomprehensible,
Is out of rivalry, which thus you can
Love, tho' unloving all conceived by Man—
What need ! And of—none the minutest duct
To that out-Nature, nought that would instruct
And so let rivalry begin to live—
But of a Power its representative
Who, being for authority the same,
Communication different, should claim
A course the first chose and this last revealed—
This Human clear, as that Divine concealed—
What utter need !"

What Sordello needed was the teaching of the New Testament. In the Christian ideal of service he might have found that "moon" which would have drawn the full forces of his soul into a single channel and given to him the sense of proportion which above all else he needed. Nothing else would have satisfied him, and this he was denied. He had outgrown his principles. He could not co-ordinate his facts. His inductive basis was too wide. The usual fallacy of generalizing from an insufficient amount of data, so conspicuous with the Naddos of life, was in Sordello's case reversed. He died while still looking for that higher synthesis in which the appalling contradictions of life might be reconciled, for he could find no viewpoint far enough from the turmoil of life to give a true perspective to the picture as a whole.

(26) Before we leave this aspect of the poem, we must notice the strong autobiographical element which is

conspicuous in the thought throughout, but notably in the long digression which forms the last half of Bk. iii. While the atmosphere and colouring of *Sordello* is wonderfully mediæval, Browning has used *Sordello* to put forward his own views as to the purpose and right use of the poetic gift. These appear voiced in his own person in the digression and through *Sordello* in the last book.

The peculiar endowment of the poet, says Browning, is the power to make other people see what he sees himself. It is therefore vitally necessary that he should deal with what is most important for man to realize and think about. It is a prostitution of his art to make men think about mere trivialities, "the mugwort that conceals a dewdrop safe,"¹ and sonnets on "the earliest ass that spoke."

Men turn to him for inspiration, and he holds in his hands to do good or evil. And the first claim of all is that of suffering humanity. The problem of evil and the question of its alleviation, dealt with from the highest standpoint, is his task. Experience changed Browning's own outlook, and his early optimism was dissipated by facts, ugly but incontestable. Yet he holds no man is past hope and that everyone keeps his own conceit of truth. Sin is more due to mutual misunderstanding than inherent wickedness, and the poet's work is to keep the truth before the world, leaving it to the practical men to find ways and means to deal with the concrete problem. When these two work together with mutual understanding, when high thinking and wise application join together their forces, then will real work for man be done.

" In short
When at some future no-time a brave band
sees, using what it sees, then shake my hand
In heaven, my brother ! "

Thus was *Sordello* right in his claim to be as poet "earth's essential king"; where he failed was in trying

¹ K. M. Loudon, in his commentary on *Sordello*, has this note on these words: "I do not know what this means, except, perhaps, that even a weed has its treasure. Even the worst man has his good point." This is a good example of unsympathetic criticism and complete inability to realize Browning's sense of humour. Browning has suffered much for being taken too seriously and not being permitted the most harmless of jokes.

to be both thinker and organizer, in failing to recognize that in this world there are limits to human power, and that each must "fit to the finite his infinity." To life here are attached conditions which must be respected. Thus Sordello, thrusting too much Soul on Body, pressing into Time Eternity's concern, broke beneath the strain.

"and the poor body soon
Sinks under what was meant a wondrous boon
Leaving its bright accomplice all aghast."

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The text of this edition is that of the 17-volume edition, which is substantially identical with that of the first collected edition of 1863, published in three volumes. The text has been collated with that of the first edition (1840) and the variations and additions noted at the foot of the text. The reader will probably notice the number of references made to *Johnson's Dictionary*, the reason of which is that Browning made a close study of that work when he first determined to adopt poetry as his profession in life.

If discrepancies are found between the General Introduction and those which preface each book, it is to be remembered that these latter tell the story simply as it appears in the poem, without any regard to the historicity of the facts, while in the General Introduction an attempt has been made to put the story as told by Browning into relation with the actual historical events.

SORDELLO

BOOK I

INTRODUCTION

§ 1. THE poem opens with an introduction, in which Browning explains his choice of the narrative rather than the dramatic form, and calls up an imaginary audience to listen ; after a prolongation in the form of an apostrophe on Shelley, he plunges at once into the story. The opening scene is the market square at Verona, by night. News has just arrived of the capture of Verona's Lord, Count Richard of St Boniface (in league with Azzo of Este) by Taurello Salinguerra at Ferrara. Immediate succour from Verona as one of the cities in the Lombard League is at once volunteered. To understand how these events came about, we must realize something of the political situation which lies behind the poem.

§ 2. Italy was at this time the seat of a bitter rivalry between Pope and Emperor. Every town and city throughout the land was divided into two factions—"Guelfs," the supporters of the Pope, and "Ghibelines," the upholders of the Emperor. In Frederick II., the Emperor who was reigning when *Sordello* begins, there had been some hope of a reconciliation. As a child the Pope (Innocent III.) had been his guardian, and when he came of age he had solemnly taken the cross and promised to lead a crusade.¹

§ 3. The mainstay of the Papal power was the noble house of Este, at this time under the headship of Azzo VII., one of the oldest of the Italian families who

¹ This promise, however, he delayed, and was promptly excommunicated. It was this failure which led the Pope to form the Lombard League "of fifteen cities that affect the Pope," dreading a second Barbarossa in Frederick II. (see Bk. i. 194-205). Frederick, who accomplished his Crusade later and regained Jerusalem by treaty, was again excommunicated, because, instead of exterminating the infidels he made a treaty with them.

traced back their descent to consular Rome. The interests of the Imperial party lay in the hands of the house of Romano, a family translated from Swabia, a century before, by the Emperor, and which had risen through a series of able and unscrupulous chiefs to be the greatest Imperial power in northern Italy. Its chief at this time was Ecelin III. This Ecelin had had numerous wives, among others Agnes of the house of Este, who had died, leaving him a daughter, who, under the name of Palma, is the heroine of the poem. His latest wife was Adelaide, alluded to as "the Tuscan."

§ 4. When the poem opens, the affairs of the house of Romano, and incidentally those of the whole Imperial party, have just been thrown into confusion by the death of Adelaide, and the consequent sudden entrance of Ecelin III. into a monastery at Oliero, near Bassano.¹ The Ghibelline faction was thus without a head, and the question was, Who was it to be? The natural leader was his son Ecelin IV., who, however, was not fit for the task, and the only man capable of dealing with the situation was Taurello Salinguerra, Ecelin's right-hand man, half-general, half-politician, hitherto the devoted servant of the house of Romano. At the moment of this double catastrophe Taurello was at Naples, preparing to embark with the Emperor on his long-delayed crusade. With characteristic promptitude he returns headlong to Vicenza, interviews Ecelin in his monastery, urging him to return to the world, but in vain. Then he conveys Palma to Mantua, where he explains to her the situation. The position is critical. Frederick has suddenly renounced his intention to lead the crusade, and has been excommunicated. The Imperial interests in Italy are in great danger, and a determined attack on the house of Romano by the Este faction at this juncture would spell disaster. To temporize is a necessity. He therefore proposes to Palma that she should allow herself to be formally betrothed to Richard, Count Boniface, Este's chief ally, which would ensure at least a breathing space until something can be contrived to strengthen the Imperial position. To this Palma consents, and

¹ See Bk. iii. 234-248.

they are formally betrothed by Taurello himself at Padua.

This alliance, which had long been talked of, was by no means taken seriously either by Palma or Taurello, but was regarded simply as a political expedient to be dissolved the instant the atmosphere cleared. For Palma, as a matter of fact, was not only in love at the time with Sordello, but was in possession of the secret of his birth, that he was, in fact, Taurello's own son, the significance of which fact she fully understood. Taurello was equally opposed to the match, but on very different grounds; in the first place, hatred of the house of Este was the one dominating passion of his life, and in the second place, such a union implied the breaking up of the possessions of the house of Romano by the restoration as dowry of the lands which had previously come to Ecelin through his alliance with Agnes Este, which Taurello could by no means bring himself to countenance.

§ 5. Taurello's object was to instigate a premature indiscretion on the part of the Guelf party which would enable him to charge Este and Count Boniface with such a breach of faith as would justify a repudiation of the betrothal, and at the same time give him an opportunity of reversing the balance of parties.¹ The Guelf rising for which he hoped took place at Ferrara. This was one of the cities where the parties were about equal in strength; Taurello's own firm hand had been necessary to keep the turbulent spirits in check, and he rightly judged that his retirement would herald an explosion. It was with this in his mind that he arranged for Palma's betrothal to take place at Padua, and on that very day, with the connivance of Azzo, the Guelfs rose at Ferrara.

“ The pair of goodly palaces are burned
The gardens ravaged, and your Guelf is drunk
A week with joy.”

Taurello hurries back, stamps out the insurrection in blood, drives Azzo from the city, and rules alone once more. The trouble, however, is not yet over. As Taurello had calculated, the temptation was too much for Count Boniface; instead of proceeding with his

¹ Bk. iii. 502.

train to Verona for the completion of his betrothal, as had been arranged, he hurries off to join Azzo, who, having collected fresh forces, was proceeding to besiege the victorious Salinguerra in Ferrara. Taurello calls a parley and suggests peace, inviting them to enter Ferrara and arrange terms. Richard,

“Light-hearted as a plunging star,”

falls into the trap, enters Ferrara with only fifty followers, and is promptly secured and held as hostage.

Thus was the temporary depression of the balance restored and Romano once more in the ascendant. Envoys were despatched to Verona to apprise Palma and the people of the changed aspect of affairs.

§ 6. Considering the prominence in the poem of Taurello Salinguerra, it may be well to give here a summary of his history. The family of Salinguerra came originally from Mantua, but of more recent years they had disputed the supremacy of Ferrara with the Adelardi. The last of the Adelardi was old Marchesalla, who left an only daughter, Linguetta. An alliance between young Salinguerra and Linguetta was mooted, but the plan was ruined by a sudden raid of the Ravennese Guelfs under Count Boniface (the father of our Richard), who at the instigation of Azzo (the father of our Azzo) carried off Linguetta. The townspeople professed indignation, but finding who they had to deal with, their discretion got the better part of their valour, and they gave way. Salinguerra was decoyed out of Ferrara, under the pretence of hawking, but unexpectedly returned to meet the marriage procession of Este and his bride. Taurello never forgave Este, and from this time the destruction of his house, root and branch, was the one passion of his life. Salinguerra now joined the court of Henry in Sicily, where he wedded Retrude, a relative of the Emperor.

He then returned with tokens from the Kaiser to Mantua, dislodged Azzo from the Salinguerra palace at Ferrara, and crushed the Guelf power in both cities. At this point he allied himself to the rising house of Romano, and together they endeavoured to undermine the Guelf power in Vicenza; they were, however, detected and driven from the city by Azzo and Boniface.

It was in this expulsion that the events occurred which form the plot of *Sordello*. The city was in the course of the fighting set on fire, and Adelaide and the child Ecelin, together with Retrude and the infant Sordello, were only rescued by Salinguerra's superhuman efforts. Retrude died of the shock, and Adelaide concealed the fact of Sordello's survival for her own ends, giving out that Retrude and her child were burnt and that the second infant saved was the child of the archer Elcorte, who, in saving her (Adelaide's) life, had given up his own. It was the rescue of his wife and child that caused Ecelin to utter the vow fulfilled to the world's astonishment thirty years later to bestow "his life on God, his getting, on the Church." From that time onwards Taurello devoted his life to the service of the house of Romano. A typical man of action, endowed with a clear head and a strong arm, cunning and tactful, with a useful faculty of striking hard and quickly, he soon made his presence felt. As Ecelin grew older he deteriorated, and Adelaide became the real brain of the house of Romano. So long as Adelaide planned and Taurello executed, the fortunes of the Imperialists grew and grew. Boniface and Azzo were trapped and slain. Three years later Guglielm and Aldobrand, their sons and successors, met a similar fate. All that was left as the hope of the Papal party was Azzo and Count Richard, and now, by this happy coup at Ferrara, Richard was at Salinguerra's mercy! But Adelaide was dead and Ecelin a monk at Oliero. Of Ecelin and Alberic, the two sons, the one was a monster and the other a fool—and Palma was a woman. Who was to take the lead? This was the problem that faced Taurello, the answer to which the poem relates.

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§ 1. The second half of the first Book is occupied with the story of the childhood and early development of Sordello at Goito Castle, near Mantua. In studying the character of Sordello it is necessary to recollect three facts: first, that he was a real genius, a born poet endowed with the rarest gifts; secondly, that he was utterly ignorant and uneducated; and thirdly, that he never knew the meaning of the word "love." Love-

less, ignorant, and lonely, with a soul that above all things craved Love, knowledge, and society, Sordello grew to manhood under circumstances perhaps unique in their very perverseness. His contest with the world is the struggle of immense capability without weapons against ordinary stupidity clad in the whole armoury of knowledge and experience.

[Sordello is presented to us as one of those who physically and mentally are

“ foremost in the regal class
Nature has broadly severed from her mass
Of men and framed for pleasure.”

He is of finer clay than the ordinary mortal. With such natures, says Browning, the guiding instinct is the sense of beauty ; and their perception even of the higher truths, such as the knowledge of God, comes to them not from their reasoning powers, but rather from an intuitive recognition that “ Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty.” Such characters are ever prodigal of their own wealth, and bestow upon the objects around them the riches of their own imagination, though according to their strength of mind the effect of so doing upon their own development is different. Some, for instance, entirely lose their own individuality in what they worship, and so “ forego their just inheritance ” that is a place of their own in this world. Others of greater power perceive that the ability to discern qualities in external objects is an act of their own mind, and in consequence attribute to themselves in the first instance the qualities they perceive in others, so that

“ the homage other souls direct
without—turns inward ”

—and leads to self-worship and a firm belief in their own powers to accomplish anything. The snare of such characters is that they may remain content with the realm of imagination wherein they are supreme, and thus shirk the dangers and difficulties that surround them in the world of fact. Either they do nothing, judging this world too small an arena in which to show off successfully their powers ; or, if induced to act, they do too much, seeking to thrust into a single life-time the task of ages.) Brought up from his earliest childhood

entirely alone, Sordello's development was naturally different from that of other children. On the one hand, he became thoroughly selfish, for he had no one to think about but himself, and (devoid of any instruction) without a moral sense; on the other hand, he became self-contained and self-dependent, for he had to tax his own resources entirely for pleasure and amusement. Thus in lieu of playmates he turns to the trees and flowers, endowing them with the various qualities and attributes he finds within himself, bestowing upon them separate individualities and treating them as friends and equals. But though deprived of the normal training of worldly experience, time does for him at last what contact with other minds does for most children a good deal earlier in life, and he becomes self-conscious. He becomes aware that the powers and personalities with which he has clothed the natural objects around him are, after all, but the results of his own Will, and that a great and wide difference divides man from nature. The enchantment of nature vanishes, and "amid his wild wood sights he lived alone." This awakening of his own personality comes as somewhat of a shock and tends to make him under-estimate nature's place in the scheme of things as much as he previously over-estimated it,¹ but he soon readjusts himself to his new-found knowledge. Nature, he perceives, has her functions, limited no doubt, but real enough and performed with amazing faithfulness. What then is his? Is it enough for him to stand on the pedestal of his personality content to observe and sympathize with surrounding objects? Why not strive after fresh experience? Has he no proper function of his own as man? If he has exhausted the joys of nature, are there not whole regions as yet unexplored in humanity? Can he not create a world of men and women before whom he can display more fully the powers within him and from whose appreciation he may draw a deeper joy than nature can provide?

§ 2. So Sordello sets himself, out of the scraps of gossip gathered from the servants at the castle and the tales and stories he had heard and his own interpretation of such occasional events as the sudden arrival of

¹ L. 700 ff.

Taurello with his body-guard of archers, to people a world with men and women before whom in his dreams he parades himself now in one capacity, now in another. But it is just at this point that Sordello, through no fault of his own, commits the mistake which is to hamper all his efforts for years to come, a mistake never fully rectified, though dimly perceived at the last. It is that effective action in this world comes not from self-display, however great our powers, but from willing service of others. His failure to realize this was due to the fact that the one great example of its truth which draws from the depth of the infant soul the latent idea of service—a mother's love—was denied him. For the germ of unselfishness implanted in each human soul is nursed and tended into conscious existence by maternal love. Deprived of this most precious gift from infancy, and denied also the only other channel through which it could come—education—Sordello was left without the one truth lofty enough to temper the conscious greatness of his powers and to give him in later life an ideal worthy of the full devotion of body and soul.¹

§ 3. So Sordello creates his array of men and women and exhausts himself in the variety of his inventions. Yet he is dimly conscious that if ever he is to triumph in the world of real men and women he will need something more than imaginative power. But each attempt to exercise his physical powers only reveals to him the more clearly his weakness, until finally he yields himself entirely to the fascination of his imagination, and remains content with the victories and applause so certain and complete, which he can always command in the realm of fancy. At this point his ideas undergo a further transformation. He develops a tendency to combine in one ideal figure the qualities and attributes he has hitherto scattered broadcast. The result is Apollo—the essence of human perfection. But the creator and the creation are difficult to keep apart; "what I can create I must be," argues Sordello, until at last they coalesce and Sordello and Apollo are one. A similar transformation among his female creations produces Daphne, a worthy object of Apollo's love. But fact and fancy again are mingled,

¹ This is perhaps the underlying idea in the passage, 731-748.

and into Daphne comes the figure of Palma, the story of whose beauty and suit with Count Boniface he has heard from the castle servants. Thus at the close of the first book Sordello dreams, until at last

“ an accident
Which, breaking on Sordello's mixed content
Opened, like any flash that cures the blind
The veritable business of mankind.”

TO J. MILSAND, OF DIJON

DEAR FRIEND,—Let the next poem be introduced by your name, therefore remembered along with one of the deepest of my affections, and so repay all trouble it ever cost me. I wrote it twenty-five years ago for only a few, counting even in these on somewhat more care about its subject than they really had. My own faults of expression were many; but with care for a man or book such would be surmounted, and without it what avails the faultlessness of either? I blame nobody, least of all myself, who did my best then and since; for I lately gave time and pains to turn my work into what the many might,—instead of what the few must,—like: but after all, I imagined another thing at first, and therefore leave as I find it. (The historical decoration was purposely of no more importance than a background requires; and my stress lay on the incidents in the development of a soul: little else is worth study.) I, at least, always thought so—you, with many known and unknown to me, think so—others may one day think so; and whether my attempt remain for them or not, I trust, though away and past it, to continue ever yours.

R. B.

LONDON, *June 9, 1863.*

SORDELLO

1840

BOOK THE FIRST

Who will, may hear Sordello's story told :
His story ? Who believes me shall behold
The man, pursue his fortunes to the end,
Like me : for as the friendless-people's friend
Spied from his hill-top once, despite the din
And dust of multitudes, Pentapolin ¹
Named o' the Naked Arm, I single out
Sordello, compassed murkily about
With ravage of six long sad hundred years.
Only believe me. Ye believe ?

Book I
Intro-
duction

Appears

10

Verona . . . Never,—I should warn you first,—²
Of my own choice had this, if not the worst
Yet not the best expedient, served to tell
A story I could body forth so well
By making speak, myself kept out of view,
The very man as he was wont to do,
And leaving you to say the rest for him.
Since, though I might be proud to see the dim

¹ The allusion is from *Don Quixote*, Pt. I. c. iv., where Don Quixote persuades Sancho that the dust raised by a flock of sheep is the army of Alifanfaron, "and that other," he adds, "belongs to the king of the Garamanteans, known by the name of Pentapolin with the naked arm, because he always goes to battle with the sleeve of his right arm tucked up." In the revised edition of 1863 Browning's heading for the first page is "A Quixotic attempt," hence the allusion.

² The introduction (1-72) may be subdivided as follows, 10-30. Explanation of Browning's choice of the narrative rather than the dramatic form. 30-60. He summons an imaginary audience to listen (he can always do that, though his living audiences, *i.e.* readers, are scanty enough). 60-72. Apostrophe on the spirit of Shelley.

Book I Abysmal past divide its hateful surge,
 Intro- Letting of all men this one man emerge 20
 duction Because it pleased me, yet, that moment past,
 I should delight in watching first to last
 His progress as you watch it, not a whit
 More in the secret than yourselves who sit
 Fresh-chapleted to listen. But it seems
 Your setters-forth of unexampled themes,
 Makers of quite new men, producing them,
 Would best chalk broadly on each vesture's hem
 The wearer's quality ; or take their stand,
 Motley on back and pointing-pole in hand,¹ 30
 Beside him. So, for once I face ye, friends,
 Summoned together from the world's four ends,
 Dropped down from heaven or cast up from hell,
 To hear the story I propose to tell.
 Confess now, poets know the dragnet's trick,
 Catching the dead, if fate denies the quick,
 And shaming her² ; 'tis not for fate to choose
 Silence or song because she can refuse
 Real eyes to glisten more, real hearts to ache
 Less oft, real brows turn smother for our sake : 40
 I have experienced something of her spite ;
 But there's a realm wherein she has no right
 And I have many lovers. Say, but few
 Friends fate accords me ? Here they are : now view
 The host I muster ! Many a lighted face
 Foul with no vestige of the grave's disgrace :
 What else should tempt them back to taste our air
 Except to see how their successors fare ?
 My audience ! and they sit, each ghostly man

28. Would] had.

¹ Browning carries this out literally. Throughout the poem he is, as it were, a spectator of the action, from time to time bursting in to criticize his own creation (not infrequently to the utter confusion of the reader), sometimes with a broad humour quite suggestive of motley.

² Browning means that if a poet cannot command popularity he has at least imagination enough to call up an audience from the past. No one can prevent him doing this, and he proceeds to do it. The passage, of course, refers to the limited numbers of copies of his previous works which were sold. The few who did read his poems were, however, enthusiasts—"the elect, chiefly for love."

Striving to look as living as he can,
 Brother by breathing brother ; thou art set,
 Clear-witted critic, by¹ . . . but I'll not fret
 A wondrous soul of them, nor move death's spleen
 Who loves not to unlock them. Friends ! I mean
 The living in good earnest—ye elect
 Chiefly for love—suppose not I reject
 Judicious praise, who contrary shall peep,
 Some fit occasion, forth, for fear ye sleep,
 To glean your bland approvals. Then, appear, —
 Verona ! stay—thou, spirit,² come not near
 Now—not this time desert thy cloudy place
 To scare me, thus employed, with that pure face !
 I need not fear this audience, I make free
 With them, but then this is no place for thee !
 The thunder-phrase of the Athenian, grown
 Up out of memories of Marathon,³
 Would echo like his own sword's griding screech
 Braying a Persian shield,—the silver speech
 Of Sidney's self, the starry paladin,
 Turn intense⁵ as a trumpet sounding in
 The knights to tilt,—wert thou to hear ! What heart
 Have I to play my puppets, bear my part
 Before these worthies ?

50 Book I

60

Apos-
trophe on
Shelley

4

70

Lo, the past is hurled
 In twain : up-thrust, out-staggering on the world.
 Subsiding into shape, a darkness rears
 Its outline, kindles at the core, appears
 Verona. 'Tis six hundred years and more

Verona :
night,
historical
setting

53. Death] death. 60. not] nor.

¹ This is a little bit of humour meaning to imply that Browning puts the critic next to some author who in life he had handled severely.

² The heading on the page at the close of this passage in the Edit. of 1863 reads: "Shelley departing, Verona appears." These headings were added by Browning himself.

³ Æschylus, the Greek poet, who fought against the Persians at Marathon.

⁴ His nom-de-plume was "Astrophel."

⁵ Forced : strained ; when used as here of literary style. Johnson quotes Roscommon—

"Sublime or low, unbended or intense,
 The sound is still a comment to the sense."

Book I Since an event. The Second Friedrich ¹ wore
 The purple, and the Third Honorius filled
 The holy chair. That autumn eve was stilled : 80
 A last remains of sunset dimly burned
 O'er the far forests, like a torch-flame turned
 By the wind back upon its bearer's hand
 In one long flare of crimson ; as a brand,
 The woods beneath lay black. A single eye
 From all Verona cared for the soft sky.
 But, gathering in its ancient market-place,
 Talked group with restless group ; and not a face
 But wrath made livid, for among them were 90
 Death's staunch purveyors, such as have in care
 To feast him. Fear had long since taken root
 In every breast, and now these crushed its fruit,
 Scene in the Square The ripe hate, like a wine : to note the way
 It worked while each grew drunk ! Men grave and grey
 Stood, with shut eyelids, rocking to and fro,
 Letting the silent luxury trickle slow
 About the hollows where a heart should be ;
 But the young gulped with a delirious glee
 Some foretaste of their first debauch in blood 100
 At the fierce news : for, be it understood,
 Envoys apprised Verona that her prince
 Count Richard of Saint Boniface, joined since
 The A year with Azzo, Este's Lord, to thrust
 cause Taurello Salinguerra, prime in trust
 With Ecelin Romano, from his seat
 Ferrara,—over zealous in the feat
 And stumbling on a peril unaware,
 Was captive, trammelled in his proper snare,

¹ Grandson of the Great Frederic I. (Barbarossa), "successively the pupil, the enemy, and the victim of the Church" (Gibbon). Neither Pope nor Emperor come actually into the story, though from time to time their shadows fall across the background of the picture. Frederic II. was born in 1194. The same year Ecelin's son (the last Ecelin) was born (according to the story, at Vicenza), just before the expulsion which took place the same year. Honorius III. was Pope from 1216 to 1227. Frederic's father, Henry VI., died in 1197, and his mother, Constance, in 1198. Until his coronation in 1212, the real emperor was Otho IV., who had successfully disputed the throne with Philip, Frederic's uncle. Frederic died in 1250. All of these are mentioned in the poem.

They phrase it, taken by his own intrigue.¹
 Immediate succour from the Lombard League
 Of fifteen cities that affect the Pope,²
 For Azzo, therefore, and his fellow-hope
 Of the Guelf cause, a glory overcast !
 Men's faces, late agape, are now aghast.
 " Prone is the purple pavis³ ; Este makes
 " Mirth for the devil when he undertakes
 " To play the Ecelin ; as if it cost
 " Merely your pushing-by to gain a post
 " Like his ! The patron tells ye, once for all,
 " There be sound reasons that preferment fall
 " On our beloved "

110 Book I

Com-
ments of
crowd

120

" Duke o' the Rood, why not ? "
 Shouted an Estian, " grudge ye such a lot ?

" The hill-cat⁴ boasts some cunning of her own,
 " Some stealthy trick to better beasts unknown,
 " That quick with prey enough her hunger blunts,
 " And feeds her fat while gaunt the lion hunts."

" Taurello," quoth an envoy, " as in wane
 " Dwelt at Ferrara.⁵ Like an osprey fain
 " To fly but forced the earth his couch to make
 " Far inland, till his friend the tempest wake,

Envoy's
story

130

116. pavis] pavice.

¹ The envoys are from Taurello, as the tone of their language makes plain. The " immediate succour " would be the voluntary and spontaneous response of the Veronese, who were members of the Lombard League. The envoys' speech stops at " intrigue."

² This renewal of the first Lombard League (1167 A.D.) took place in 1226. The following towns joined :—Milan, Bologna, Piacenza, Verona, Brescia, Faenza, Mantua, Vercelli, Lodi, Bergamo, Turin, Alessandria, Vicenza, Padua, and Treviso. The historical facts were that Lombardy with Papal consent was put under the ban of the Empire, Pope and Emperor joining together : this singular position was due to Papal anxiety for the Crusade. The next Pope, Gregory IX., took a different view. The removal of the ban took place in 1227, almost Honorius' last act.—Kington, *History of Frederick II.*

³ A convex shield large enough to cover the whole body, used as a defence against archery, especially in sieges : the term has been enlarged to cover any large shield carried by a page. The ground of the Este arms was azure, with a silver eagle.

⁴ The Hill-cat, *i.e.* Ecelin da Romano. The lion is Este.

⁵ This is ironical. The Envoy puts the Guelf point of view, but only to show how greatly they were mistaken in the sequel. Taurello was always most dangerous when he appeared weakest.

Book I " Waits he the Kaiser's coming ; and as yet
 " That fast friend sleeps, and he too sleeps : but let
 " Only the billow freshen, and he snuffs
 " The aroused hurricane ere it enroughs
 " The sea it means to cross because of him.
 " Sinketh the breeze ? His hope-sick eye grows dim ;
 " Creep closer on the creature ! Every day
 " Strengthens the Pontiff ; Ecelin, they say,
 " Dozes now at Oliero, with dry lips 140
 " Telling upon his perished finger-tips
 " How many ancestors are to depose
 " E'er he be Satan's Viceroy when the doze
 " Deposits him in hell. So, Guelfs rebuilt
 " Their houses ; not a drop of blood was spilt
 " When Cino Bocchimpane chanced to meet
 " Buccio Virtù—God's wafer, and the street
 " Is narrow ! Tutti Santi, think, a-swarm
 " With Ghibellins, and yet he took no harm !
 " This could not last. Off Salinguerra went 150
 Guelfs " To Padua, Podestà,¹ ' with pure intent,'
 rise " Said he, ' my presence, judged the single bar
 " ' To permanent tranquillity, may jar
 " ' No longer '—so ! his back is fairly turned ?
 " The pair of goodly palaces are burned,
 " The gardens ravaged,² and our Guelfs laugh, drunk
 " A week with joy. The next, their laughter sunk
 " In sobs of blood, for they found, some strange way,
 " Old Salinguerra back again—I say,
 " Old Salinguerra in the town once more 160

156. and our Guelfs, etc.] and your Guelf is drunk—a week with joy. 157 their] his. 158. they] he.

¹ Party feeling ran so high in Italian towns that the practice grew up of inviting some prominent citizen from some other city to come and dispense justice as chief magistrate, with the title of Podesta. Taurello's action was, however, on this occasion, as we learn from Palma's speech in Bk. iii. (502-516), a piece of deep diplomacy, for a rising of the Guelfs at Ferrara was just what he hoped for. See Introd., Bk. i. 5.

² The following description of Salinguerra's two dwelling-places in Ferrara is given in the *Parva Chronica Ferrariensis* : Salinguerra . . . cum non solum habueret in Parrochia Sancti Salvatoris, ubi habitabat, aedes, et Palatia magna, verum etiam pomaria, hortos, vinctum et pratum et profui et fautorum ejus tutamine ibi Castellum construxit quod fossis aggere et vallo munivit ac turribus, in necessitatibus opportunum.

Book I

Taurello
returns

" Uprooting, overturning, flame before,
 " Blood fetlock-high beneath him. Azzo fled ;
 " Who 'scaped the carnage followed ; then the dead
 " Were pushed aside from Salinguerra's throne,
 " He ruled once more Ferrara, all alone,
 " Till Azzo, stunned awhile, revived, would pounce
 " Coupled with Boniface, like lynx and ounce,
 " On the gorged bird. The burghers ground their teeth
 " To see troop after troop encamp beneath
 " I' the standing corn thick o'er the scanty patch 170
 " It took so many patient months to snatch
 " Out of the marsh ; while just within their walls
 " Men fed on men. At length Taurello calls
 " A parley : ' let the Count wind up the war ! '
 " Richard, light-hearted as a plunging star,
 " Agrees to enter for the kindest ends
 " Ferrara, flanked with fifty chosen friends,
 " No horse-boy more, for fear your timid sort
 " Should fly Ferrara at the bare report.
 " Quietly through the town they rode, jog-jog ; 180
 " ' Ten, twenty, thirty,—curse the catalogue
 " ' Of burnt Guelf houses ! Strange, Taurello shows
 " ' Not the least sign of life '—whereat arose
 " A general growl : ' How ? With his victors by ?
 " ' I and my Veronese ? My troops and I ?
 " ' Receive us, was your word ? ' So jogged they on,
 " Nor laughed their host too openly : once gone
 " Into the trap ¹ !—”

Capture
of
Richard

Six hundred years ago !
 Such the time's aspect and peculiar woe
 (Yourselves may spell it yet in chronicles, 190
 Albeit the worm, our busy brother, drills
 His sprawling path through letters anciently
 Made fine and large to suit some abbot's eye)
 When the new Hohenstauffen dropped the mask,
 Flung John of Brienne's favour from his casque,
 Forsook crusading, had no mind to leave
 Saint Peter's proxy leisure to retrieve

¹ This is quite historical and took place in 1224 A.D. Rolandino gives no exact numbers for Richard's escort, merely saying, " cum quadam militum quantitate." Pietro Gerardo, however, is more explicit, and says, " con circa cinquanta cavalli " (*Vita Ezzelino*, iii. p. 18).

BOOK I Losses to Otho and to Barbaross,
 Empire Or make the Alps less easy to recross ;
 and And, thus confirming Pope Honorius' fear, 200
 Papacy Was excommunicate that very year.¹

" The triple-bearded Teuton come to life ! " ²
 Groaned the Great League ; and, arming for the strife,
 Wide Lombardy, on tiptoe to begin,
 Took up, as it was Guelf or Ghibellin,
 Its cry : what cry ?

" The Emperor to come ! "
 His crowd of feudatories, all and some,
 That leapt down with a crash of swords, spears, shields,
 One fighter on his fellow, to our fields,
 Scattered anon, took station here and there, 210
 And carried it, till now, with little care—
 Cannot but cry for him ; how else rebut
 Us longer ?—cliffs, an earthquake suffered jut ³
 In the mid-sea, each domineering crest
 Which nought save such another throe can wrest

215. Which nought] nothing save such, etc.

¹ Frederic II. displayed great eagerness for a crusade, but constantly postponed it. His son-in-law, John of Brienne, titular King of Jerusalem, sent him a palm branch to remind him (Bk. i. 870). When everything was in readiness at Naples for embarkation he suddenly threw up the idea for political reasons and was excommunicated. He afterwards went and made an advantageous treaty with the Saracens, but his preference for treaty rather than slaughter caused his second excommunication. It should be remembered that the crusades were always a great political opportunity for the Popes getting their chief opponents out of the way, who often left their kingdoms in the hands of Ecclesiastics (ll. 197-199).

² Frederic I. (Barbarossa), of whom the legend was current that he was not dead (he was drowned going on a crusade) but sat with his knights around a table in a castle in Thuringia, and would come to life when his beard had grown three times round the table. He invaded Italy several times : on the first occasion he was crowned in the Vatican ; twelve years later he besieged Rome and seated an Anti-Pope in the Papal chair. His severity and power made him dreaded by the Papal party, hence, when his grandson forswore his crusade, he was promptly excommunicated.

³ Cliffs represent Imperialists, chokeweed the Guelfs. Though putting the Ghibelline point of view the speaker is apparently a Guelf. The Ghibelline cry for the Emperor is natural, he says ; how else prevent their complete absorption by the Guelfs, who every day grow stronger,

- Book I A country or a name, presumes to couch
Beside their noblest ; until men avouch
That, of all Houses in the Trevisan,
Conrad describes no fitter, rear or van,
Than Ecelo ! They laughed as they enrolled 250
That name at Milan on the page of gold,
Godego's lord,—Ramon, Marostica,
Cartiglion, Bassano, Loria,
And every sheep-cote on the Suabian's fief !
- Ecelin II No laughter when his son, " the Lombard Chief "
(the stam- Forsooth, as Barbarossa's path was bent
merer) To Italy along the Vale of Trent,
Welcomed him at Roncaglia ¹ ! Sadness now—
The hamlets nested on the Tyrol's brow,
The Asolan and Euganean hills, 260
The Rhetian and the Julian, sadness fills
Them all, for Ecelin vouchsafes to stay
Among and care about them ; day by day
Choosing this pinnacle, the other spot,
A castle building to defend a cot,
A cot built for a castle to defend,
Nothing but castles, castles nor an end
To boasts how mountain ridge may join with ridge
By sunken gallery and soaring bridge.²
He takes, in brief, a figure that beseems 270
The griesliest nightmare of the Church's dreams,
—A Signory firm-rooted, unestranged
From its old interests, and nowise changed

252. Godego's lord]. For Godego, Ramon, Marostica. 262.
Them all, for] Them all that.

quo venerat de Alemannia miles ab uno equo. Browning's use of the word " Saxon " is probably a recollection of an earlier passage, where Verci quotes Alfonso Loschi as saying, " Ecelino fu originato dal sangue de " Sassoni." It is not so easy to explain why he uses " Yoland," since the name does not occur anywhere in the family, and no hint is given by any author of any such name. Several writers, however, call the originator of the family Ecelino d'Olanda, which may possibly have suggested " Yoland."

¹ Roncaglia. The plain of Roncaglia was the spot where the Emperors held their Diets to settle the law and the payments of Italy. Frederic Barbarossa held the one here alluded to in 1154.

² Hence the " Hill-cat."

By its new neighbourhood : perchance the vaunt Book I
 Of Otho, " my own Este shall supplant
 " Your Este," come to pass.¹ The sire led in
 A son as cruel ; and this Ecelin
 Had sons, in turn, and daughters sly and tall Ecelin III
 And curling and compliant ; but for all (the
 Romano (so they styled him) throve, that neck 280 monk)
 Of his so pinched and white, that hungry cheek
 Proved 'twas some fiend, not him, the man's-flesh went
 To feed : whereas Romano's instrument,
 Famous Taurello Salinguerra, sole Sketch of
 I' the world, a tree whose boughs were slipt the bole Salin-
 Successively,² why should not he shed blood guerra
 To further a design ? Men understood
 Living was pleasant to him as he wore
 His careless surcoat, glanced some missive o'er,
 Propped on his truncheon in the public way, 290
 While his lord lifted writhen hands to pray,
 Lost at Oliero's convent.

Hill-cats, face

Our Azzo, our Guelf Lion ! Why disgrace The
 A worthiness conspicuous near and far House of
 (Atii at Rome while free and consular, Este
 Este at Padua who repulsed the Hun)³

280. throve] thrives. 282. proved] prove. the man's flesh]
 men's flesh is meant. 286. should] shall. 291. While, etc.]
 Ecelin lifts two writhen hands to pray—at Oliero's convent now.
 So, place-for Azzo, Lion of the . . . why, etc. 296. who] to
 repulse.

¹ Otho IV. was distantly connected with the house of Este through the marriage of Cunigunda, the sister of Welf the Younger, to Azzo (III.) in 1055. Thus the house of Este was represented on the Ghibelline side by the Emperor (or his nominée Ecelin) and on the Guelf side by the present Marquis Azzo VII. Thus if the Imperial cause triumphed through the rise of the Romano family, the Guelf Este might be said to be supplanted by the Ghibelline Este.

² He was really Sordello's father, though he thought his son had been killed. The true story told by Adelaide to Palma when dying was by her repeated to Taurello and Sordello. See *Introd.*, Bk. i., § 6.

³ Pigna, in his *Historia Principi di Este*, begins the Este pedigree with one Caio Atio, whose son of the same name he designates " Decurione et Principe di Este." Later in the history he relates the prowess of the Este in the Hunnish invasion under Attila.

- Book I By trumpeting the Church's princely son ?
 —Styled Patron of Rovigo's Polesine,
 Ancona's march, Ferrara's . . . ask, in fine,
 Our chronicles, commenced when some old monk 300
 Found it intolerable to be sunk
 (Vexed to the quick by his revolting cell)
 Quite out of summer while alive and well :
 Ended when by his mat the Prior stood,
 'Mid busy promptings of the brotherhood,
 Striving to coax from his decrepit brains
 The reason Father Porphyry took pains
 To blot those ten lines out which used to stand
 First on their charter drawn by Hildebrand.¹
 The same night wears. Verona's rule of yore 310
 Was vested in a certain Twenty-four ;
 And while within his palace these debate
 Concerning Richard and Ferrara's fate,
 Ecclin's castle at Verona Glide we by clapping doors, with sudden glare
 Of cressets vented on the dark, nor care
 For aught that's seen or heard until we shut
 The smother in, the lights, all noises but
 The carroch's booming² : safe at last ! Why strange
 Such a recess should lurk behind a range 320
 Of banquet-rooms ? Your finger—thus—you push
 A spring, and the wall opens, would you rush
 Upon the banqueters, select your prey,
 Waiting (the slaughter-weapons in the way
 Strewing this very bench) with sharpened ear
 A preconcerted signal to appear ;
 Or if you simply crouch with beating heart,
 Bearing in some voluptuous pageant part
 To startle them. Nor mutes nor masquers now ;
 Palma and Sordello Nor any . . . does that one man sleep whose brow
 The dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o'er ? 330
 What woman stood beside him ? not the more

300. Our] Your.

¹ This is a good example of the unnecessary padding in *Sordello*. It is quite irrelevant and only serves to confuse the action.

² This was a chariot, or rather waggon, painted with vermilion and bearing a bell and the city standard. It was invented by Eribert, Archbishop of Milan, about 1039 (Hallam). There was also an altar upon it and ministrant priests went with it. Cf. Bk. iv. 350 ff.

Is he unfastened from the earnest eyes
 Because that arras fell between ! Her wise
 And lulling words are yet about the room,
 Her presence wholly poured upon the gloom
 Down even to her vesture's creeping stir.
 And so reclines he, saturate with her,
 Until an outcry from the square beneath
 Pierces the charm ¹ : he springs up, glad to breathe,
 Above the cunning element, ² and shakes 340
 The stupor off as (look you) morning breaks
 On the gay dress, ³ and, near concealed by it,
 The lean frame like a half-burnt taper, lit
 Erst at some marriage-feast, then laid away
 Till the Armenian bridegroom's dying day,
 In his wool wedding-robe.

For he—for he,
 Gate-vein of this hearts' blood of Lombardy,
 (If I should falter now)—for he is thine !
 Sordello, thy forerunner, Florentine !
 A herald-star I know thou didst absorb ⁴ 350
 Relentless into the consummate orb
 That scared it from its right to roll along
 A sempiternal path with dance and song
 Fulfilling its allotted period,
 Serenest of the progeny of God—
 Who yet resigns it not ! His darling stoops
 With no quenched lights, desponds with no blank troop
 Of disenfranchised brilliances, for, blent
 Utterly with thee, its shy element
 Like thine upburneth prosperous and clear. 360
 Still, what if I approach the august sphere
 Named now with only one name, disentwine
 That under-current soft and argentine
 From its fierce mate in the majestic mass
 Leavened as the sea whose fire was mixt with glass

Sordello
 —the
 fore-
 runner
 of Dante .

¹ See Bk. iii. 280-304.

² Palma has been putting before Sordello her plans for the future, in which he is to assume the headship of the house of Romano. See her long speech, Bk. iii. 325-573.

³ That of Court Minstrel.

⁴ Sordello's story and the part he played in history have hitherto been obscured by Dante, his great successor. Browning is going to disentangle it.

Book I In John's transcendent vision,¹—launch once more
 That lustre? Dante, pacer of the shore
 Where glutton hell disgorgeth filthiest gloom,²
 Unbitten by its whirring sulphur-spume—
 Or whence the grieved and obscure waters slope 370
 Into a darkness quieted by hope;
 Plucker of amaranths grown beneath God's eye
 In gracious twilights where his chosen lie,—
 I would do this! If I should falter now!
 Goito In Mantua territory half is slough,
 castle Half pine-tree forest; maples, scarlet oaks
 near Breed o'er the river-beds; even Mincio chokes
 Mantua With sand the summer through: but 'tis morass
 In winter up to Mantua walls. There was,
 Some thirty years before this evening's coil, 380
 One spot reclaimed from the surrounding spoil,
 Goito; just a castle built amid
 A few low mountains; firs and larches hid
 Their main defiles, and rings of vineyard bound
 The rest. Some captured creature in a pound,
 Whose artless wonder quite precludes distress,
 Secure beside in its own loveliness,
 So peered with airy head, below, above,
 The castle at its toils, the lapwings love
 To glean among at grape-time.³ Pass within. 390
 A maze of corridors contrived for sin,
 Dusk winding-stairs, dim galleries got past,
 You gain the inmost chambers, gain at last
 A maple-panelled room: that haze which seems
 Floating about the panel, if there gleams
 A sunbeam over it, will turn to gold

¹ "And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire."—Rev. xv. 2.

² Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise are successively indicated.

³ Goito is about ten miles from Mantua on the road to Brescia. It consists to-day of a small village comprising a single street and a few scattered houses. A tall red-brick mediæval tower called the "Torre Sordello" is the only architectural feature; beyond this no sign of a castle exists. The tower bears a modern inscription in praise of Sordello. The tower recalls the Ecelini castle at Bassano in appearance, and traces of very old red-brick walls suggest that Browning may be right as to a castle. It is probable, however, that Browning wrote this description previous to his visit to Italy, so that unless he revised it after his return, it is most likely pure conjecture.

And in light-graven characters unfold Book I
 The Arab's wisdom everywhere ¹; what shade
 Marred them a moment, those slim pillars made,
 Cut like a company of palms to prop 400
 The roof, each kissing top entwined with top,
 Leaning together; in the carver's mind
 Some knot of bacchanals, flushed cheek combined
 With straining forehead, shoulders purpled, hair
 Diffused between, who in a goat-skin bear
 A vintage; graceful sister-palms! But quick
 To the main wonder, now. A vault, see; thick
 Black shade about the ceiling, though fine slits The Font
 Across the buttress suffer light by fits
 Upon a marvel in the midst. Nay, stoop— 410
 A dullish grey-streaked cumbrous font, a group
 Round it,—each side of it, where'er one sees,—
 Upholds it; shrinking Caryatides
 Of just-tinged marble like Eve's liliated flesh
 Beneath her maker's finger when the fresh
 First pulse of life shot brightening the snow.
 The font's edge burthens every shoulder, so
 They muse upon the ground, eyelids half closed;
 Some, with meek arms behind their backs disposed,
 Some, crossed above their bosoms, some, to veil 420
 Their eyes, some, propping chin and cheek so pale,
 Some, hanging slack an utter helpless length
 Dead as a buried vestal whose whole strength
 Goes when the grate above shuts heavily.²
 So dwell these noiseless girls, patient to see,
 Like priestesses because of sin impure
 Penanced for ever, who resigned endure,
 Having that once drunk sweetness to the dregs.
 And every eve, Sordello's visit begs
 Pardon for them: constant as eve he came 430
 To sit beside each in her turn, the same
 As one of them, a certain space: and awe

¹ Adelaide was deeply read in astrology, a science which reached Italy from the Mahometans in Spain. A letter is extant from Ecelin to his sons, in which he alludes to their mother Adelaide, who, he says, "knew the courses of the stars."

² At Rome the sacred fire of Vesta was tended by chosen virgins called vestals. They took a vow of service for thirty years. Unchaste virgins were buried alive in the Campus Sceleratus.

Book I Made a great indistinctness till he saw
 Sordello Sunset slant cheerful through the buttress-chinks,
 and the Gold seven times globed ¹; surely our maiden shrinks
 Font And a smile stirs her as if one faint grain
 Her load were lightened, one shade less the stain
 Obscured her forehead, yet one more bead slipt
 From off the rosary whereby the crypt
 Keeps count of the contritions of its charge ²? 440
 Then with a step more light, a heart more large,
 He may depart, leave her and every one
 To linger out the penance in mute stone.
 Ah, but Sordello? 'Tis the tale I mean
 To tell you.

In this castle may be seen,
 On the hill tops, or underneath the vines,
 Or eastward by the mound of firs and pines
 That shuts out Mantua, still in loneliness,
 A slender boy in a loose page's dress,
 Sordello: do but look on him awhile 450
 Watching ('tis autumn) with an earnest smile
 The noisy flock of thievish birds at work
 Among the yellowing vineyards; see him lurk
 ('Tis winter with its sullenest of storms)
 Beside that arras-length of broidered forms,
 On tiptoe, lifting in both hands a light
 Which makes yon warrior's visage flutter bright
 —Ecelo, dismal father of the brood,
 And Ecelin, close to the girl he wooed,
 Auria, and their Child, with all his wives 460
 From Agnes to the Tuscan that survives,
 Lady of the Castle, Adelaide.³ His face

447. eastward] southward.

¹ Gold is refined in globes (D.).

² Sordello did not know it, but his mother Retrude was buried beneath this font. See Bk. v. 795.

³ Ecelin the Stammerer married Auria da Baone. Ecelin the Monk was their second son, and had four wives, viz., Agnes Este, Speronella Dalesmannini, Cecilia da Abano, and Adelaide of Mangone (see Table). Agnes Este died giving birth to a daughter, the "Palma" of *Sordello*. Speronella, though only fifteen, had already been married to four husbands; she deserted Ecelin, and married her sixth husband, Olderico da Monselice, and died in 1199 at the age of fifty. Cecilia, who was an orphan, was destined to marry Gerardo Camposampiero; Ecelin, how-

—Look, now he turns away ! Yourselves shall trace
 (The delicate nostril swerving wide and fine,
 A sharp and restless lip, so well combine
 With that calm brow) a soul fit to receive
 Delight at every sense ; you can believe
 Sordello foremost in the regal class
 Nature has broadly severed from her mass
 Of men, and framed for pleasure, as she frames
 Some happy lands, that have luxurious names,
 For loose fertility ; a footfall there
 Suffices to upturn to the warm air
 Half-germinating spices ; mere decay
 Produces richer life ; and day by day
 New pollen on the lily-petal grows,
 And still more labyrinthine buds the rose.
 You recognize at once the finer dress
 Of flesh that amply lets in loveliness
 At eye and ear, while round the rest is furled
 (As though she would not trust them with her world)
 A veil that shows a sky not near so blue,
 And lets but half the sun look fervid through.
 How can such love ?—like souls on each full-fraught
 Discovery brooding, blind at first to aught
 Beyond its beauty, till exceeding love
 Becomes an aching weight ; and, to remove
 A curse that haunts such natures—to preclude
 Their finding out themselves can work no good
 To what they love nor make it very blest
 By their endeavour,—they are fain invest
 The lifeless thing with life from their own soul,
 Availing it to purpose, to control,
 To dwell distinct and have peculiar joy
 And separate interests that may employ
 That beauty fitly, for its proper sake.¹

Book I
 Sordello

470

480

490

His sensi-
 tiveness
 to Beauty

484. Such love ?] How can such love like souls, etc.

ever, by a trick married her to his son. In revenge she was violated by Gerardo while on a visit : on her return she was repudiated by Ecelin, who soon after married his fourth and last wife, Adelaide, sister of the Conte de Mangone.

¹ This overpowering sense of beauty leads such natures as Sordello to clothe the inanimate objects around them each with a personality of its own. Partly to satisfy their own luxuriant imagination, partly also to hide from themselves the truth that man " dwells with beauty, beauty that must die."

Book I Nor rest they here ; fresh births of beauty wake
 Fresh homage, every grade of love is past,
 With every mode of loveliness : then cast
 Inferior idols off their borrowed crown 500
 Before a coming glory. Up and down
 Runs arrowy fire, while earthly forms combine
 To throb the secret forth ; a touch divine—
 And the scaled eyeball owns the mystic rod ;
 Visibly through his garden walketh God.¹

(i) Ob- So fare they. Now revert. {One character
 jective Denotes them through the progress and the stir,—
 worship A need to blend with each external charm,
 Bury themselves, the whole heart wide and warm,—
 In something not themselves ; they would belong 510
 To what they worship—stronger and more strong
 Thus prodigally fed—which gathers shape
 And feature, soon imprisons past escape
 The votary framed to love and to submit
 Nor ask, as passionate he kneels to it,
 Whence grew the idol's empery.² So runs
 A legend ; light had birth ere moons and suns,

¹ This sensibility to beauty, beginning with mere unconscious worship, ultimately, however, reveals the deepest truths. The knowledge of God, for instance, comes to such rather through a kind of sudden æsthetic intuition than through any process of reasoning.

We have in this passage an epitome of Browning's philosophy. He carries Keats' phrase, "Beauty is Truth, Truth beauty," to its full conclusion, "Beauty is truth : Truth is Love and Love is God." The imagery of this passage is drawn from the Old Testament. Cf. Ezekiel c. i. v. 14: "And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning." See the whole chapter, and again the verse in Micah vi. 9: "The man of wisdom shall see Thy name ; hear ye the rod and who hath appointed it."

² There is a type of character upon which a keen sense of beauty reacts with ill effect. With such the heart runs away with the head. Giving themselves up to the luxury of sensuous delight, they sacrifice their individuality to emotional enjoyment. They become the slaves of what they worship, and in consequence gain nothing, being unable to turn their artistic perception to higher uses. There is, however, a stronger type, who, realizing that the perception of beauty is the action of their own mind, remain masters of what they worship. With such the danger is not loss of individuality, but excess of self-worship. Sordello was of this stronger class, with whom "homage, other souls direct without—turns inward."

Flowing through space a river and alone,
 Till chaos burst and blank the spheres were strown
 Hither and thither, foundering and blind : 520
 When into each of them rushed light—to find
 Itself no place, foiled of its radiant chance.¹
 Let such forego their just inheritance !
 For there's a class that eagerly looks, too,
 On beauty, but, unlike the gentler crew,
 Proclaims each new revelation born a twin
 With a distinctest consciousness within,
 Referring still the quality, now first
 Revealed, to their own soul—its instinct nursed
 In silence, now remembered better, shown 530
 More thoroughly, but not the less their own ;
 A dream come true ; the special exercise
 Of any special function that implies
 The being fair, or good, or wise, or strong,
 Dormant within their nature all along—
 Whose fault ? So, homage, other souls direct
 Without, turns inward.) “ How should this deject
 “ Thee, soul ? ” they murmur ; “ wherefore strength be
 quelled
 “ Because, its trivial accidents withheld,
 “ Organs are missed that clog the world, inert, 540
 “ Wanting a will, to quicken and exert,
 “ Like thine—existence cannot satiate,
 “ Cannot surprise ? Laugh thou at envious fate,
 “ Who, from earth's simplest combination stamp't
 “ With individuality—uncrampt
 “ By living its faint elemental life,
 “ Dost soar to heaven's complexest essence, rife
 “ With grandeurs, unafironted to the last,
 “ Equal to being all ! ” ²

In truth ? Thou hast

¹ As the Light is said to have lost its own place and personality by filling the stars, so the soul that buries itself indiscriminately in the things without it loses likewise its own individuality.

² Nature strikes the balance between the spiritual and the material by denying to the poetic soul the active principle which results in deeds and which characterizes the man of action. Sordello, conscious of his weakness on the physical side, excuses himself by depreciation of that which he lacks and a corresponding exaltation of that which he possesses, and remains content with the conscious potentialities of powers he cannot use.

- Book I Life, then—wilt challenge life for us : our race 550
 Is vindicated so, obtains its place
 In thy ascent, the first of us ; whom we
 May follow, to the meanest, finally,
 With our more bounded wills ¹ ?
 Ah, but to find
 Their A certain mood enervate such a mind,
 weakness Counsel it slumber in the solitude
 Thus reached nor, stooping, task for mankind's good
 Its nature just as life and time accord
 " —Too narrow an arena to reward
 Do noth- " Emprize—the world's occasion worthless since 560
 ing " Not absolutely fitted to evince
 " Its mastery ! " Or if yet worse befall,
 And a desire possess it to put all
 That nature forth, forcing our straitened sphere
 Contain it,—to display completely here
 The mastery another life should learn,
 Thrusting in time eternity's concern,—
 or try too So that Sordello. . . .
 much Fool, who spied the mark
 Of leprosy upon him, violet-dark
 Already as he loiters ² } Born just now 570
 With the new century ' beside the glow
 And efflorescence out of barbarism ;
 Witness a Greek or two from the abysm ³
 That stray through Florence-town with studious air,
 Calming the chisel of that Pisan pair ⁴ :

¹ The contrast is between this dream-child of genius and the ordinary mortal, who for all his limitations and disadvantages at least does something with his life, whereas such as Sordello either do nothing (this world being deemed too small to adequately show off their powers) or, if moved to action, try too much and break down beneath the strain.

² Browning was nearly anticipating his story by an ill-timed exposure of his hero's real weakness, so he breaks abruptly off into a description of Italy, now first stirring with the breath of the Renaissance.

³ The Byzantine Empire was now beginning its final struggle with the Turks. Constantinople had been conquered and sacked, moreover, by the Crusaders in 1204, which had led to the dissemination of Greek art and influence in the West.

⁴ The first of the pair is evidently Niccola Pisano (c. 1206-1278), sculptor and architect, whose baptistery at Pisa and pulpit in the cathedral at Siena are still admired. The second can scarcely

If Nicolo should carve a Christus yet !
 While at Siena is Guidone set ¹
 Forehead on hand ; a painful birth must be
 Matured ere Saint Eufemia's sacristy
 Or transept gather fruits of one great gaze 580
 At the moon : look you ! The same orange haze,—
 The same blue stripe round that—and, in the midst
 Thy spectral whiteness, Mother-maid, who didst
 Pursue the dizzy painter !

Woe, then, worth

Any officious babble letting forth
 The leprosy confirmed and ruinous
 To spirit lodged in a contracted house !
 Go back to the beginning, rather ; blend
 It gently with Sordello's life ; the end
 Is piteous, you may see, but much between 590
 Pleasant enough. Meantime, some pyx to screen
 The full-grown pest, some lid to shut upon
 The goblin ! So they found at Babylon,²
 (Colleagues, mad Lucius and sage Antonine)
 Sacking the city, by Apollo's shrine,
 In rummaging among the rarities,
 A certain coffer ; he who made the prize
 Opened it greedily ; and out there curled
 Just such another plague, for half the world
 Was stung. Crawl in then, hag, and couch asquat, 600
 Keeping that blotchy bosom thick in spot
 Until your time is ripe ! The coffer-lid
 Is fastened, and the coffer safely hid
 Under the Loxian's choicest gifts of gold.³

581. Moon] noon-sun. The same] An . . . 596.] Its pride,
 in rummaging the rarities—A cabinet.

be Guidone, and is no doubt Giovanni Pisano, the son and apt pupil of Niccola (D.).

¹ In the church of S. Domenico at Siena there is a picture of a Virgin and child enthroned. Some hold that the work, though it bears this printer's name (with some letters erased) is too good to have been done at so early a period (1221), which is also marked on the picture (D).

² The legend is related by Ammianus Marcellinus of the sack of Apollo's shrine at Seleucia by the Roman General Verus and the Philosopher-Emperor Marcus Aurelius.

³ Apollo was known by the epithet Loxian as being the interpreter of Zeus. Sordello regarded himself as the interpreter of knowledge to mankind.

Book I Who will may hear Sordello's story told,

And how he never could remember when

He dwelt not at Goito. Calmly, then,

About this secret lodge of Adelaide's

Glided his youth away ; beyond the glades

On the fir-forest border, and the rim

610

Of the low range of mountain, was for him

Sordello's No other world : but this appeared his own

child-
hood

To wander through at pleasure and alone.

The castle too seemed empty ; far and wide

Might he disport ; only the northern side

Lay under a mysterious interdict—¹

Slight, just enough remembered to restrict

His roaming to the corridors, the vault

Where those font-bearers expiate their fault,

The maple-chamber, and the little nooks

620

And nests, and breezy parapet that looks

Over the woods to Mantua : there he strolled.

Some foreign women-servants, very old,

Tended and crept about him—all his clue

To the world's business and embroiled ado

Distant a dozen hill-tops at the most.

And first a simple sense of life engrossed

Sordello in his drowsy Paradise ;

The day's adventures for the day suffice—

His de-
velop-
ment :
(i) Per-
ception

Its constant tribute of perceptions strange,

630

With sleep and stir in healthy interchange,

Suffice, and leave him for the next at ease

Like the great palmer-worm that strips the trees,

Eats the life out of every luscious plant,

And, when September finds them sere or scant,

Puts forth two wondrous winglets, alters quite,

And hies him after unforeseen delight.²

612. this] that. 615. only] unless.

¹ That is the portion used by Taurello Salinguerra when he came to the castle, was forbidden to Sordello by Adelaide for fear of a meeting and possible recognition between father and son.

² " These are a sort of hairy caterpillars, which in England have the name of Palmer Worm, because they wander from place to place, like Palmers or Pilgrims : some call them bear-worms, because they are all over hair, and others Millers, but for what reason is uncertain. Many of these feed on all sorts of greens indifferently, though some of them do not (Buffon, *Nat. Hist*

So fed Sordello, not a shard dissheathed ;
 As ever, round each new discovery, wreathed
 Luxuriantly the fancies infantine
 His admiration, bent on making fine
 Its novel friend at any risk, would fling
 In gay profusion forth : a ficklest king,
 Confessed those minions !—eager to dispense
 So much from his own stock of thought and sense
 As might enable each to stand alone
 And serve him for a fellow ; with his own,
 Joining the qualities that just before
 Had graced some older favourite. Thus they wore
 A fluctuating halo, yesterday
 Set flicker and to-morrow filched away,—
 Those upland objects each of separate name,
 Each with an aspect never twice the same,
 Waxing and waning as the new-born host
 Of fancies, like a single night's hoar-frost,
 Gave to familiar things a face grotesque ;
 Only, preserving through the mad burlesque
 A grave regard. Conceive ! the orpine patch
 Blossoming earliest on the log-house thatch
 The day those archers wound along the vines—
 Related to the Chief that left their lines
 To climb with clinking step the northern stair
 Up to the solitary chambers where
 Sordello never came.¹ Thus thrall reached thrall ;
 He o'er-festooning every interval,
 As the adventurous spider, making light
 Of distance, shoots her threads from depth to height,
 From barbican to battlement : so flung
 Fantasies forth and in their centre swung
 Our architect,—the breezy morning fresh
 Above, and merry,—all his waving mesh
 Laughing with lucid dew-drops rainbow-edged.

640

(ii) Im-
agination

650

660

Sordello's ..
imagina-
tion

670

649. Thus] So. 659. on the] on our.

Insects). Commonly known as "woolly-bears" : the caterpillar of the tiger-moth. Cf. Keats, *St Agnes's Eve*:

"Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes
 As are the tiger moths' deep-damasked wings."

¹ Sordello found analogies between the most diverse objects; nothing came amiss to his powers of invention and imagination. Stonecrop is the common species of orpine.

Book I This world of ours by tacit pact is pledged
 To laying such a spangled fabric low
 Whether by gradual brush or gallant blow.
 But its abundant will was baulked here : doubt
 Rose tardily in one so fenced about
 From most that nurtures judgment,—care and pain :
 Judgment, that dull expedient we are fain,
 Less favoured, to adopt betimes and force 680
 Stead us, diverted from our natural course
 Of joys—contrive some yet amid the dearth,
 Vary and render them, it may be, worth
 His in- Most we forego. Suppose Sordello hence
 nocence Selfish enough, without a moral sense
 However feeble ; what informed the boy
 Others desired a portion in his joy ?
 Or say a ruthless chance broke woof and warp—
 A heron's nest beat down by March winds sharp,
 A fawn breathless beneath the precipice, 690
 A bird with unsoiled breast and unfilmed eyes
 Warm in the brake—could these undo the trance
 Lapping Sordello ? Not a circumstance
 That makes for you, friend Naddo ¹ ! Eat fern-seed ²
 And peer beside us and report indeed
 If (your word) "genius" dawned with throes and
 stings
 And the whole fiery catalogue, while springs,
 Summers, and winters quietly came and went.
 Time put at length that period to content,
 By right the world should have imposed : bereft 700
 Of its good offices, Sordello, left
 To study his companions, managed rip
 Their fringe off, learn the true relationship,
 Core with its crust, their nature with his own :
 Amid his wild-wood sights he lived alone.
 Self-con- As if the poppy felt with him ! Though he
 scious-
 ness 676. baulked] balked. 699. Time put] Putting.

¹ Naddo (one of the Trouveres or Troubadours) stands for the embodiment of common sense and worldly wisdom, to whom such as Sordello was a perpetual enigma. His idea of genius as born "with throes and stings" was contradicted by Sordello's placid childhood.

² Compare 1 *Henry IV.*, Act II. Sc. i. 105: "We have the receipt of fern-seed, we walk invisible."

Partook the poppy's red effrontery
 Till Autumn spoiled their fleering quite with rain,
 And, turbanless, a coarse brown rattling crane
 Lay bare. That's gone : yet why renounce, for that, 710
 His disenchanted tributaries—flat
 Perhaps, but scarce so utterly forlorn,
 Their simple presence might not well be borne
 Whose parley was a transport once : recall
 The poppy's gifts, it flaunts you, after all,
 A poppy :—why distrust the evidence
 Of each soon satisfied and healthy sense ?
 The new-born judgment answered, " little boots
 " Beholding other creatures' attributes
 " And having none ! " or, say that it sufficed, 720
 " Yet, could one but possess, oneself," (enticed
 Judgment) " some special office ! " Nought beside
 Serves you ? " Well then, be somehow justified
 " For this ignoble wish to circumscribe
 " And concentrate, rather than swell, the tribe
 " Of actual pleasures : what, now, from without
 Effects it ?—proves, despite a lurking doubt,
 " Mere sympathy sufficient, trouble spared ?
 " That, tasting joys by proxy thus, you fared ¹
 " The better for them ? " Thus much craved his
 soul. 730

Desire
 for
 Action

708. spoiled] spoils. 710. Lay bare] Protrudes. 713.
 might] may. 729. That . . . you] He tasted joys by proxy,
 clearly fared.

¹ With time came self-consciousness, and with self-consciousness came loneliness. Yet though the gilding is torn from nature, the sense of purpose and evidence of design remains. What, then is, the purpose of his own life ? Even at this early stage Sordello perceives the need for action and the danger of contentments with triumphs that cost nothing.

Compare with lines 699-705 Wordsworth's treatment of the same idea :

" Heaven lies about us in our infancy !

The youth who daily further from the East
 Must travel still is nature's priest,
 And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended,
 At length the Man perceives it die away
 And fade into the light of common day."

(Intim. of Immort.)

Book I Alas, from the beginning love is whole
 And true ; if sure of nought beside, most sure
 Of its own truth at least ; nor may endure
 A crowd to see its face, that cannot know
 How hot the pulses throb its heart below :
 While its own helplessness and utter want

Power of Of means to worthily be ministrant
 Love To what it worships, do but fan the more
 Its flame, exalt the idol far before
 Itself as it would have it ever be.

740

Souls like Sordello, on the contrary,
 Coerced and put to shame, retaining will,
 Care little, take mysterious comfort still,
 But look forth tremblingly to ascertain
 If others judge their claims not urged in vain,
 And say for them their stifled thoughts aloud.
 So, they must ever live before a crowd :
 —“Vanity,” Naddo tells you.¹

Where contrive
 A crowd now ? From these women just alive,
 That archer-troop ? Forth glided—not alone
 Each painted warrior, every girl of stone,
 Nor Adelaide (bent double o'er a scroll,
 One maiden at her knees, that eve, his soul
 Shook as he stumbled through the arras'd glooms
 On them, for, 'mid quaint robes and weird perfumes,
 Started the meagre Tuscan up,—her eyes,
 The maiden's, also, bluer with surprise)
 —But the entire out-world : whatever, scraps
 And snatches, song and story, dreams perhaps,
 Conceited the world's offices, and he
 Had hitherto transferred to flower or tree,

750

760

740. would have it ever be] would ever have it be. 746.
 And say] Will say . . . 749. From these women] These brave
 women . . . 761.] Transferred to the first comer, flower or tree.

¹ It is the natural love of a child for its parents that usually modifies the individualism of early manhood with a feeling of duty and a certain willing self-sacrifice. This Sordello never knew, and in consequence his egotism was unchecked. Absence from the world kept him from the other influence which teaches most men to find their level, while his inventive brain supplied him with just what was worst for him, an audience debarred from criticism. This, with such as Sordello, is not mere vanity, but rather the creative instinct which will not be repressed.

Book I

Not counted a befitting heritage
 Each, of its own right, singly to engage
 Some man, no other,—such now dared to stand
 Alone. Strength, wisdom, grace on every hand
 Soon disengaged themselves, and he discerned
 A sort of human life : at least, was turned
 A stream of lifelike figures through his brain.
 Lord, liegeman, valvassor and suzerain,
 Ere he could choose, surrounded him ; a stuff
 To work his pleasure on ; there, sure enough :
 But as for gazing, what shall fix that gaze¹ ?
 Are they to simply testify the ways
 He who convoked them sends his soul along
 With the cloud's thunder or a dove's brood-song ?
 —While they live each his life, boast each his own
 Peculiar dower of bliss, stand each alone
 In some one point where something dearest loved
 Is easiest gained—far worthier to be proved
 Than aught he envies in the forest-wights !
 No simple and self-evident delights,
 But mixed desires of unimagined range,
 Contrasts or combinations, new and strange,
 Irksome perhaps, yet plainly recognized
 By this, the sudden company—loves prized
 By those who are to prize his own amount
 Of loves.² Once care because such make account,
 Allow that foreign recognitions stamp
 The current value, and his crowd shall vamp
 Him counterfeits enough ; and so their print

His
audience

770

780

Appreci-
ative but
un-
critical

790

764. dared] availed. 788. that] a. 789. his . . . him] your
 . . you.

¹ Sordello having evolved his new world of men and women, each endowed with their own peculiar powers, is faced by the question what relation are they to bear to him and he to them ? How is he to fix their gaze upon himself and reveal himself to each several individual as their own special ideal ? By deserting himself to live in each in turn, he will only obtain whatever share of applause may fall to the character he for the time represents, and what he wants is the quintessence of all.

² Sordello has in his mind an ideal of greatness far beyond anything he has yet conceived and bestowed upon any of his creations, which is to be a combination of every kind of joy—a quintessence of all joys—by means of which he will become the centre of the world's envy and applause.

Book I Be on the piece, 'tis gold, attests the mint,
 And "good," pronounce they whom his new appeal
 Is made to : if their casual print conceal—
 This arbitrary good of theirs o'ergloss
 What he has lived without, nor felt the loss—
 Qualities strange, ungainly, wearisome,
 —What matter¹ ? So must speech expand the dumb
 Part-sigh, part-smile with which Sordello, late
 Whom no poor woodland-sights could satiate,
 Betakes himself to study hungrily 800
 Just what the puppets his crude phantasy
 Supposes notabest,—popes, kings, priests, knights,—
 May please to promulgate for appetites ;
 Accepting all their artificial joys
 Not as he views them, but as he employs
 Each shape to estimate the other's stock
 Of attributes, whereon—a marshalled flock
 Of authorized enjoyments—he may spend
 Himself, be men, now, as he used to blend
 With tree and flower—nay more entirely, else 810
 'T were mockery : for instance, " How excels
 " My life that chieftain's ? " (who apprised the youth
 Ecelin, here, becomes this month, in truth,
 Imperial Vicar ?) " Turns he in his tent
 " Remissly ? Be it so—my head is bent
 " Deliciously amid my girls to sleep.
 " What if he stalks the Trentine-pass ? Yon steep
 " I climbed an hour ago with little toil :
 " We are alike there. But can I, too, foil
 " The Guelf's paid stabber, carelessly afford 820
 " Saint Mark's a spectacle, the sleight o' the sword
 " Baffling the treason in a moment² ? " Here

795. He] I. 807. Whereon] that on . . . 822. the treason]
 their project.

¹ Sordello has a far-away idea that merely to applaud the good without criticizing the bad is unnatural. But criticism would be unpleasant, and after all though he may be conscious of weakness, there is no need for the painful process of improvement.

² The story is given is Sismondi : Ecelin and Azzo, meeting at the court of Otho IV., the former accused the latter of attempting to assassinate him. " We were together at Venice, and I was walking with him in La Place de Saint Marc, when some assassins flung themselves upon me to stab me : at this moment

No rescue ! Poppy he is none, but peer
 To Ecelin, assuredly : his hand,
 Fashioned no otherwise, should wield a brand
 With Ecelin's success—try, now ! He soon
 Was satisfied, returned as to the moon
 From earth ; left each abortive boy's-attempt
 For feats, from failure happily exempt,
 In fancy at his beck.¹ " One day I will
 " Accomplish it ! Are they not older still
 " —Not grown-up men and women ? 'Tis beside
 " Only a dream ; and though I must abide
 " With dreams now, I may find a thorough vent
 " For all myself, acquire an instrument
 " For acting what these people act ; my soul
 " Hunting a body out may gain its whole
 " Desire some day ! " How else express chagrin
 And resignation, show the hope steal in
 With which he let sink from an aching wrist
 The rough-hewn ash-bow ? Straight, a gold shaft
 hissed
 Into the Syrian air, struck Malek down
 Superbly ! " Crosses to the breach ! God's Town
 " Is gained him back ! " Why bend rough ash-bows
 more ?
 Thus lives he : if not careless as before,
 Comforted : for one may anticipate,
 Rehearse the future, be prepared when fate
 Shall have prepared in turn real men whose names
 Startle, real places of enormous fames,
 Este abroad and Ecelin at home
 To worship him,—Mantua, Verona, Rome

Book I

Physical
weakness

830

840

A Bayard
in imagin-
ation.

850

837. may gain] obtain. 841. Straight, a] and a . . . 844.
 Is] was . . . 851. Mantua, Verona,] Mantuas Veronas . . .

the Marquis seized my arm to prevent me defending myself, and had I not torn myself from him by a violent effort, I should without a doubt have been killed, as one of my soldiers who was beside me actually was" (*Hist. Rep. Ital.* Bk. ii. c. xiii.). It is also related by Verci and others.

¹ The one point where failure had to be admitted was physical strength. He excuses himself on the score of age.

² How infinitely easier are victories won mentally rather than by actual physical effort ! A feeble boy, but a very Bayard in imagination !

BOOK I To witness it.¹ {Who grudges time so spent ?
 Time will Rather test qualities to heart's content—
 show Summon them, thrice selected, near and far—
 Compress the starriest into one star,
 And grasp the whole at once ! }

The pageant thinned

Accordingly ; from rank to rank, like wind
 His spirit passed to winnow and divide ;
 Back fell the simpler phantasms ; every side
 The strong clave to the wise ; with either classed 86a
 The beauteous ; so, till two or three amassed
 Mankind's beseemingnesses, and reduced
 Themselves eventually,—graces loosed,
 Strengths lavished,—all to heighten up One Shape
 Whose potency no creature should escape.
 Apollo Can it be Friedrich of the bowmen's talk ?
 Surely that grape-juice, bubbling at the stalk,
 Is some grey scorching Saracenic wine
 The Kaiser quaffs with the Miramoline²—
 Those swarthy hazel-clusters, seamed and chapped, 87o
 Or filberts russet-sheathed and velvet-capped,
 Are dates plucked from the bough John Brienne sent
 To keep in mind his sluggish armament
 Of Canaan³ :—Friedrich's, all the pomp and fierce
 Demeanour ! But harsh sounds and sights transpierce
 So rarely the serene cloud where he dwells
 Whose looks enjoin, whose lightest words are spells
 On the obdurate ! That right arm indeed

856. And] so. 864. Strengths lavished] and lavished strengths,
 to heighten . . . 878. right] omitted.

¹ One of Sordello's pet delusions was the idea that if you could conceive how a thing should be done you could do it whenever the opportunity came. Though he was forced to acknowledge that the reasoning broke down in regard to physical efforts, he never would admit that it could fail in any other way, and in consequence he believed himself capable of almost any task, from governing the world downwards. 'This was, of course, due to want of experience, and ignorance of human nature.

² A Saracenic title—Prince of the Faithful. Browning probably drew the words from the *Chronicon Estense*, where, alluding to the expulsion of the Moors from Spain in the year 1224, the passage occurs, "tunc temporis potentia Regis Africæ, qui dicitur Miramolinus," etc.

³ See l. 195.

Has thunder for its slave ; but where's the need Book I
 Of thunder if the stricken multitude 880
 Harkens, arrested in its angriest mood,
 While songs go up exulting, then dispread,
 Dispart, disperse, lingering overhead
 Like an escape of angels ? 'T is the tune,
 Nor much unlike the words his women croon
 Smilingly, colourless and faint-designed
 Each, as a worn-out queen's face some remind
 Of her extreme youth's love-tales. "Eglamor
 "Made that !" Half minstrel and half emperor,
 What but ill objects vexed him ? Such he slew. 890
 The kinder sort were easy to subdue His feats
 By those ambrosial glances, dulcet tones ; as Apollo
 And these a gracious hand advanced to thrones
 Beneath him. Wherefore twist and torture this,
 Striving to name afresh the antique bliss,
 Instead of saying, neither less nor more,
 He had discovered, as our world before,
 Apollo ? That shall be the name ; nor bid
 Me rag by rag expose how patchwork hid
 The youth—what thefts of every clime and day 900
 Contributed to purfle the array
 He climbed with (June at deep) some close ravine
 Mid clatter of its million pebbles sheen,
 Over which, singing soft, the runnel slipped
 Elate with rains : into whose streamlet dipped
 He foot, yet trod, you thought, with unwet sock—
 Though really on the stubs of living rock
 Ages ago it crenelled ; vines for roof,
 Lindens for wall ; before him, aye aloof,
 Flittered in the cool some azure damsel-fly.¹ 910
 Born of the simmering quiet, there to die.
 Emerging whence, Apollo still, he spied
 Mighty descents of forest ; multiplied

900. The youth] the man. 908. crenelled] crenneled (1840
 and 1863 Eds.). 911. Born] Child . . .

¹ Dragon-fly : French "demoiselle." The banks of the Mincio
 at Goito are frequented by a small dragon-fly with deep azure
 wings and a lovely sapphire body. In their flight they do not
 dart, but use their wings like butterflies : Browning's word
 "flitter" is a very happy description. The reading of revised
 edition "Born" for "Child," is preferable.

Book I Tuft on tuft, here, the frolic myrtle-trees,
 There gendered the grave maple stocks at ease.
 And, proud of its observer, straight the wood
 Tried old surprises on him ; black it stood
 A sudden barrier ('twas a cloud passed o'er)
 So dead and dense, the tiniest brute no more
 Must pass ; yet presently (the cloud dispatched) 920
 Each clump, behold, was glistening detached
 A shrub, oak-boles shrunk into ilex-stems !
 Yet could not he denounce the stratagems
 He saw thro', till, hours thence, aloft would hang
 White summer-lightnings ; as it sank and sprang
 To measure, that whole palpitating breast
 Of heaven, 'twas Apollo,¹ nature preest
 At eve to worship.

Time stole : by degrees
 The Pythons perish off² ; his votaries
 Sink to respectful distance ; songs redeem 930
 Their pains, but briefer ; their dismissals seem
 Emphatic ; only girls are very slow
 To disappear—his Delians ! Some that glow
 O' the instant, more with earlier loves to wrench
 Away, reserves to quell, disdains to quench ;
 Alike in one material circumstance—
 All soon or late adore Apollo ! Glance
 The bevy through, divine Apollo's choice,
 His Daphne ! " We secure Count Richard's voice
 " In Este's counsels, good for Este's ends 940
 Gossip " As our Taurello," say his faded friends,
 " By granting him our Palma ! "—the sole child,
 They mean, of Agnes Este who beguiled
 Ecelin, years before this Adelaide

921. behold] forsooth. 926. To measure] In measure. 929.
 period] perished. 930. Sink] sunk. 939. His Daphne] A Daphne.
 940. good for] one for.

¹ Apollo, the Greek god, was the type of masculine beauty in body and mind. He fell in love with Daphne, who fled from him, and to escape him was turned into a laurel, after which Apollo always wore a laurel wreath. He also slew a monstrous serpent which haunted the caves of Parnassus and was known as the Python. His chief shrine was at Delos, where the priestesses worshipped him. Sordello's Delians did the same, as his imagined Daphne fled from him also (see Bk. ii. 15 ff.).

² That is, as he got older his imaginary victories grew less.

Wedded and turned him wicked : " but the maid Book I
 " Rejects his suit," those sleepy women boast.
 She, scorning all beside, deserves the most
 Sordello ¹ : so, conspicuous in his world
 Of dreams sat Palma. How the tresses curled
 Into a sumptuous swell of gold and wound 950
 About her like a glory ! even the ground
 Was bright as with spilt sunbeams ; breathe not, breathe
 Not !—poised, see, one leg doubled underneath,
 Its small foot buried in the dimpling snow, Picture
 Rests, but the other, listlessly below, of Palma
 O'er the couch-side swings feeling for cool air,
 The vein-streaks swollen a richer violet where
 The languid blood lies heavily ; yet calm
 On her slight prop, each flat and outspread palm,
 As but suspended in the act to rise 960
 By consciousness of beauty, whence her eyes
 Turn with so frank a triumph, for she meets
 Apollo's gaze in the pine glooms.

Time fleets :

That's worst ! Because the pre-appointed age
 Approaches. Fate is tardy with the stage
 And crowd she promised. Lean he grows and pale,
 Though restlessly at rest. Hardly avail
 Fancies to soothe him. Time steals, yet alone
 He tarries here ! The earnest smile is gone.
 How long this might continue matters not ; 970
 —For ever, possibly ; since to the spot
 None come : our lingering Taurello quits
 Mantua at last, and light our lady flits
 Back to her place disburthened of a care.
 Strange—to be constant here if he is there ² !
 Is it distrust ? Oh, never ! for they both
 Goad Ecelin alike, Romano's growth
 Is daily manifest, with Azzo dumb

952. spilt] shed. 957. Swollen] Swoln (1840 and 1863 Eds.).
 966. And crowd] She all but . . . 977. Is] so . . . that . . .

¹ This proved to be true in the future : at present it was only an egotistic guess. This gossip about Palma gets mixed up with the Daphne ideal in Sordello's mind, and produces a hybrid personage called the forest lady.

² Sordello, in capacity as page, would follow Adelaide, and she feared his meeting his father.

Book I And Richard wavering : let but Friedrich come,
 Find matter for the minstrelsy's report 980
 —Lured from the Isle¹ and its young Kaiser's court
 To sing us a Messina morning up,
 And, double rillet of a drinking cup,
 Sparkle along to ease the land of drouth,
 Northward to Provence that, and thus far south
 The other ! What a method to apprise
 Neighbours of births, espousals, obsequies,
 Which in their very tongue the Troubadour
 Records ! and his performance makes a tour,
 For Trouveres bear the miracle about, 990
 Explain its cunning to the vulgar rout,
 Until the Formidable House is famed
 Over the country—as Taurello aimed,
 Who introduced, although the rest adopt,
 The novelty.² Such games, her absence stopped,
 Begin afresh now Adelaide, recluse
 No longer, in the light of day pursues
 Her plans at Mantua : whence an accident
 Which, breaking on Sordello's mixed content
 Opened, like any flash that cures the blind, 1000
 The veritable business of mankind.

983. And, double rillet] Who, double rillets . . . 995. Such games] Their games . . .

¹ Sicily, where Frederick II. was brought up and had his court.

² The troubadours were Provençal in origin, and here said to be introduced into Italy for political purposes by Taurello. The part played by the trouveres would be to announce the coming performance and incidentally enlarge upon the theme—the glories of the Imperial House. Sismondi tells us it was Azzo of Este, Taurello's rival, who introduced them to Ferrara (*Lit. of S. Europe*, vol. i. 163). Browning makes no clear distinction in his use of "troubadour" and "trouvere" throughout the poem. The distinction is not easy to make. With some it is held to be geographical, the former being of Provençal and the latter of Northern French origin. With others it is (as here) one of degree: the troubadour being the courtly knight who composed, the trouveres being his attendants, who sang his "treuves." With others the distinction is one of style: the troubadours retaining the musical element, and thus becoming the forerunners perhaps of opera; the trouveres discarding music and becoming the forerunners of modern literature. Similarly, Browning mixes the French forms of troubadour songs such as "the rondel" and the "virlai" with the Provençal forms, such as the "tenzon" and "sirvente."

BOOK II

INTRODUCTION

(1) THE second book of *Sordello* continues the story without intermission, recording Sordello's first contact with the outside world, his unexpected triumph, and subsequent disillusionment.

The narrative is briefly this—pursuing his rambles through the woods adjacent to the castle, his imagination still afire with his dreams of kingship as Apollo, with which, however, is blended a new thought, his sudden appearance in the world as the successful rival of Count Boniface for the love of Palma, Ecelin's daughter (an idea which has its germ in the gossip of the old domestics in the castle), he suddenly stumbles on a crowd assembled without the walls of Mantua, where Adelaide is holding a Court of Love for the appointment of a minstrel to Palma. He arrives just as Eglamor, the best troubadour of Boniface, is about to begin his song, "Elys" as he calls it after the heroine. Sordello listens, in amazement, for is it not the story of Apollo badly told? Stung into sudden activity, Sordello, as the song closes, leaps upon the platform and, seizing the singer's lute, "tells the true tale with the true end." When the effort is made, he faints, but not before he realizes his victory and his election as Palma's minstrel. He is borne back to Goito unconscious. For a time he remains at Goito, where one day he is present at Eglamor's funeral, whose heart was broken by his defeat. Then at the invitation of Naddo he leaves his beloved Goito for Mantua to fulfil his duties as troubadour. At this point the thread of the story is broken to describe Sordello's success and failure as a minstrel at Mantua during the next ten years. It is resumed at the close of that time by an account of the death of Adelaide and Taurello's headlong return from Naples (where he was just about to embark on Frederick's long-promised crusade), too late, however, to prevent a second cata-

strophe for the Imperial cause in Ecelin's sudden retirement into a monastery at Oliero. At this point the second book comes to an end.

(2) When Sordello came to himself after his victory in the Tournament of Song, he for the first time began to think. Having analysed the whole circumstances, he came to the conclusion, not without some surprise, that he must be an exceptionally gifted individual. The lack in others of the power which he himself possessed in so high a degree, of visualizing the creatures of his imagination until they appeared more real than the material world around him, struck him with amazement. This difference from other men became accentuated by the scene at Eglamor's graveside, when he reflected upon that poet's success and failure, for he saw how Eglamor, clinging to success, a man with talent but no genius, had missed the true aim of his vocation and thought only of himself instead of others. For a moment at any rate Sordello saw clearly. The snare of popularity and success, the danger of mistaking conventional notions of truth for truth itself, the greatness of his task if only he could "to his own self be true," rose clearly before him. But the mists of triumphs "of unimagined range" quickly enveloped him again, and the truth once more becomes obscured in those gorgeous dream-clouds of his, shot with all the colours of imagination. There were two points, however, on his mental horizon which, in spite of his utmost efforts, refused to be hidden, two awkward facts that spoil the whole landscape. The first of these was his physical weakness. In the field of action he could never excel, nor even compete. This he was obliged to admit. The second point emerged when he started to investigate his own history—"alas, they soon explained away Apollo." Here he learnt the story of his birth as generally accepted, how he was the son of an archer who had sacrificed his life in the service of the house of Romano, and had been adopted and brought up by Adelaide for his father's sake. Yet so strong was Sordello's belief in himself and his powers that, in spite of these two drawbacks, the one of which must debar him from the normal road to advancement in that age—military prowess,—and the other deprive him of that most powerful lever,

—influence, due to rank and position—he yet held firm to his purpose, convinced that even now—

"men no more
Compete with him than tree and flower before."

(3) In the interval between the scene at Eglamor's graveside and his return to Mantua, Sordello busies himself with elaborating his plan of action and method of procedure. He decides that his medium of expression must be song, through which he is to accomplish his great task. It is not altogether easy to put Sordello's ideal into words, but it may perhaps be described as an attempt to reveal man to himself through the display of his own (*i.e.* Sordello's) personality expressed in song. It is hard to decide how far this purpose was a noble one and how far it was tainted with inordinate vanity, love of display, and greed of appreciation. If, however, we give him credit for honesty, his point of view would seem to have been somewhat of this nature: his ultimate object was the raising of mankind; but he had already observed that men followed a multitude of different ideals, each "bending to his star," and concentrating himself upon a single object. Now he was conscious that he himself was myriad-minded, able to appreciate and sympathize with the most contradictory ideals. He was led by no one star. Through this peculiar faculty, then, he thought he would be able in song to show to all men the best of which each was capable and help to raise them to their highest level.

(4) While this side of Sordello's plan was altruistic, concerned mainly with the good of mankind, he conceived that he himself would receive from its execution a glorious reward, for the unstinted homage of mankind would be his, for man would find in him the combined perfections of humanity. In order that he might miss nothing of this consummation of joy, he resolves to forego all single and isolated joys lest the quintessence should be spoiled. In the matter of happiness, Sordello is truly an epicure. For him no common vintage, however highly esteemed, but a distillation of all, whose bouquet will be unsurpassable. The radical weakness of the whole conception is that it is built up on the postulate that the world will accept the creations of his

fancy as solid facts. Sordello is the realization of the Hegelian dictum that Thought is Being. Sordello believes that what he conceives himself to be, he is; and that the world will see this also, and therefore transfer to him all the admiration which they lavish upon his heroes. That they will see in him the incarnation of wisdom, strength, and beauty because he endows with these qualities the leading actors of his songs. In this way he completely neutralizes those physical deficiencies which unfortunately were indisputable, for the minstrel who to himself was Apollo is characterized by the crowd as "ugly, stunted, weak!" Neither of the two conditions essential to the success of his plans were realized. His own part of it was a failure because he proved too weak to resist the praise of the few and found himself shamefully hankering after the homage of the crowd, unable to forego the small present for the greater future to fall upon him sometime. The other condition was an even more conspicuous failure, for the people never gave him credit for the qualities even of his meanest hero, much less transferred to him as he expected those of all his separate heroes combined.

Browning, criticizing Sordello's attitude, points out that this overwhelming self-conceit, "vanity" as the crowd calls it, is really the want of love. If a man cannot throw his whole self into some great ideal beside which his very best seems paltry, all that is left to him is to worship the best he knows, which is his own endowments. Thus the opposite of self-consecration and self-sacrifice is self-worship. As a lover conceives that the whole world views the object of his love with his own eyes, so the man without love thinks that the world should esteem his greatness as highly as he does himself. Sordello's self-revelment, which is the keyword to the first half of the poem, is based on this idea. It is because he has no "oversoul," no "outsoul" in Palma's phrase, upon which to consecrate his gifts, and through which to learn of something greater than himself, that he worships and demands that the world shall worship the greatest thing he knows—his own soul.

(5) So Sordello returns to Mantua to begin his great work. And now for the first time he encounters the

practical difficulties arising in part from his own limitations, but still more from those of his listeners. The first lesson he was forced to learn was that to earn appreciation he had to make himself understood. It was one thing to sing to "his Delians," whose praise was a foregone conclusion, and quite another to hold an audience of ignorant men and women. So first his matter had to be readjusted: he must leave his "unreal pageantry of essences" and sing the romances understood of the people. Then again his language had to be simplified, a vocabulary "hammered out," which would be a fit and worthy medium of expression. Difficulties no end cropped up on the merely technical side of his art. His prize-song had been the outcome of one of those white-hot moments in which, under a sudden overwhelming inspiration, the difficulties of form and matter are for the time being swept aside; but to sing songs daily without waiting for the inspired moment required art as well as genius. All of this proved very discouraging, but he had far greater difficulties and disappointments in store for him, arising from his own weaknesses. For instance, he found himself aiming at popularity and in danger of pandering to the popular taste, deserting his ideals for praise and adulation. Then again he found that, in spite of all his efforts, his audience never transferred their allegiance from his heroes to their creator, himself. His listeners, it is true, gave him unstinted admiration: they could not conceive

"How a mere singer, ugly, stunted, weak
Had Montfort at completely (so to speak)
His finger ends—"

Yet even this was not without its sting, for Sordello bitterly realized that, though they admired his skill, the greatness of his personality and will was completely lost on them, and this ruined his plan of raising them through self-revelment. But his difficulty was still greater when he came into closer contact with Naddo and the rest of the guild, representing the intelligent portion of the community, in daily conversation. With their narrow outlook, accepted opinions, and conventional ideas, their mental equipment was the very antithesis of Sordello's. They plied him with difficulties and

conundrums which he was hopelessly ill-equipped to try and solve, and to which he could only reply either in vague generalities or by giving vent to the first answer that came to hand, regardless of its truth. Contact with humanity, instead of clarifying his ideas, seemed, only to make confusion worse confounded. The fact was that Sordello understood neither himself nor the people, and they understood him even less. With his complete want of experience ; his ignorance of human nature, and his ill-digested mass of general ideas embroidered with fictions and fancies, he could find no point of contact with his audience. Matters were still further complicated by the fact that just that very quality of sympathy with an infinite variety of natures which in his own scheme was to be his strong point, proved his fundamental weakness. The want of a "star," a central conception outside himself, prevented all progress. There was no centre to his mental orbit, and in consequence the width of its range only made his course the more erratic. The effort to try and square the facts of life as it was, with his preconceptions as to what it ought to be, rent him in twain. The poet clashed with the man, the former clinging desperately to the wreckage of his ideals, and the latter urging him to leave his dreams and lower his level to that of the humanity around him, and to be content with the prosaic joys of the crowd. It was this conflict which brought about the fiasco with which the Book closes. The power of song was deserting Sordello. He could not sing to order. He tries wildly to find inspiration with which to celebrate Taurello's return. Wandering forth at night, he suddenly finds himself back in his old-time woods at Goito : the dream of his childhood comes back upon him ; Mantua with its tasks and disappointments fades behind him, and once more the dream enwraps him wholly. Let our laurels lie.

(6) There are several points to be remembered as we read the book. It covers a period probably of some ten or twelve years. He is a sanguine boy when he first goes to Mantua, but a disappointed man when he returns. Then we must not underrate his success ; it is necessary to recollect that we look at it all the time from the high ground of Sordello's own ideal, not from the view-

point of the crowd. Had he been content with being a popular idol, with supplying the popular demand and nothing more, as Naddo and the rest besought him to be, it was always his for the asking; but it was just his refusal, his failure, wherein his real success lay hid. Like Job of old, it was his determination at all costs to hold to his one root-principle, in spite of every failure, in spite of the "best advice" from well-meaning friends, that kept the spark of greatness glowing within him.

BOOK THE SECOND

THE woods were long austere with snow : at last
 Pink leaflets budded on the beech, and fast
 Larches, scattered through pine-tree solitudes,
 Brightened, "as in the slumbrous heart o' the woods
 "Our buried year, a witch, grew young again
 "To placid incantations, and that stain
 "About were from her cauldron, green smoke blent
 "With those black pines"—so Eglamor gave vent
 To a chance fancy. Whence a just rebuke
 From his companion ; brother Naddo shook
 The solemnest of brows : "Beware," he said,
 "Of setting up conceits in nature's stead !"
 Forth wandered our Sordello. Nought so sure
 As that to-day's adventure will secure
 Palma the visioned lady ¹—only pass
 O'er yon damp mound and its exhausted grass,
 Under that brake where sundawn feeds the stalks
 Of withered fern with gold, into those walks
 Of pine and take her ! Buoyantly he went.
 Again his stooping forehead was besprent
 With dew-drops from the skirting ferns. Then wide
 Opened the great morass, shot every side
 With flashing water through and through ; a-shine,
 Thick-steaming, all-alive. Whose shape divine,
 Quivered i' the farthest rainbow-vapour, glanced
 Athwart the flying herons ? He advanced,
 But warily ; though Mincio leaped no more,
 Each foot-fall burst up in the marish-floor

Book II
 Spring

10

20 Sordello
 pursuing
 his
 Daphne-
 Palma

15. visioned lady] forest-lady. 29. he] you.

¹ Sordello's original conception of Daphne, the nymph pursued by Apollo, has got mixed up with the gossip he has heard about Palma, Ecelin's daughter, and her rumoured engagement to Boniface, and has produced the hybrid conception of Palma the forest-lady. The reading of the first edition is preferable.

Book II A diamond jet : and if he stopped to pick
 Rose-lichen, or molest the leeches quick, 30
 And circling blood-worms, minnow, newt or loach,
 A sudden pond would silently encroach
 This way and that.¹ On Palma passed. The verge
 Of a new wood was gained. She will emerge
 Flushed, now, and panting,—crowds to see,—will own
 She loves him—Boniface to hear, to goan,
 Stumbles on To leave his suit ! One screen of pine-trees still
 Mantua Opposes : but—the startling spectacle—
 Mantua, this time ! Under the walls—a crowd
 Indeed, real men and women, gay and loud 40
 Round a pavilion. How he stood !

In truth

No prophecy had come to pass : his youth
 In its prime now—and where was homage poured
 Upon Sordello ?—born to be adored,
 And suddenly discovered weak, scarce made
 To cope with any, cast into the shade
 By this and this. Yet something seemed to prick
 And tingle in his blood ; a sleight—a trick—
 And much would be explained.² It went for nought—
 The best of their endowments were ill bought 50
 With his identity : nay, the conceit,
 That this day's roving led to Palma's feet
 Was not so vain—list ! The word, "Palma !" Steal
 Aside, and die, Sordello ; this is real,

52. That this day's roving led . . .] This present roving
 leads . . .

¹ Note the beautiful detail work of this passage.

² Sordello's first contact with mankind has a twofold effect. It produces on the one hand temporary confusion and a sense of weakness, such as would be expected in such a highly sensitized nature, while on the other it arouses the deeper feeling of a desire to lead, a sense of command, inherent in his character and capabilities. Another explanation, however, may be offered, that it refers to his unexpressed criticism of the minstrels' performances, the feeling that, if only he took the trouble to learn "the tricks of the trade," he could soon exceed them all—the idea of so limiting his scope is dismissed with contempt. The objection to this interpretation is that the feeling, whatever it signified, comes apparently before he had heard anything in the way of the troubadours' songs, and no mention is made of his hearing any except that of Eglamor which follows.

And this—abjure ¹ !

What next ? The curtains see
Dividing ! She is there ; and presently
He will be there—the proper You, at length—
In your own cherished dress of grace and strength :
Most like, the very Boniface !

Book II
Adelaide's
Court of
Love

Not so.
It was a showy man advance ; but though
A glad cry welcomed him, then every sound
Sank and the crowd disposed themselves around,
—" This is not he," Sordello felt ; while, " Place
" For the best Troubadour of Boniface ! "
Hollaed the Jongleurs,—" Eglamor, whose lay
" Concludes his patron's Court of Love to-day ² ! "

60

Eglamor's
song

Obsequious Naddo strung the master's lute
With the new lute-string, " Elys," named to suit
The song : he ³ stealthily at watch, the while,
Biting his lip to keep down a great smile

70

Of pride : then up he struck. Sordello's brain
Swam ; for he knew a sometime deed again ;
So, could supply each foolish gap and chasm
The minstrel left in his enthusiasm,
Mistaking its true version—was the tale
Not of Apollo ? Only, what avail
Luring her down, that Elys an he pleased,
If the man dared no further ⁴ ? Has he ceased
And, lo, the people's frank applause half done,
Sordello was beside him, had begun

80

¹ This is Browning advising Sordello.

² " The Court of Love," properly speaking, was formed for quite another purpose than that given here. It was composed chiefly of married ladies who sat in judgment to legislate on all questions of the affections, to arrange disputes between lovers, to pass sentence on any lover who was in the wrong, and generally to establish a system of love-jurisprudence which should be useful in composing quarrels and avoiding recourse to the civil courts. Queen Eleanor of England was one of the most famous " Presidents " of such courts. Browning's conception is more akin to the Tournaments of Song of the German Minnesingers.

³ *I.e.* Eglamor : El-lys the lily.

⁴ Sordello's criticism of Eglamor's song. What is the use, he cries, of a half-finished song such as this ? He lures his goddess from her heaven and then, afraid of his own temerity, leaves her. See lines 213-19. Eglamor's subject-matter was sometimes beyond his power to handle adequately. His treatment was unworthy of his theme.

BOOK II (Spite of indignant twitchings from his friend
 The Trouvere) the true lay with the true end,
Sordello's Taking the other's names and time and place
song For his. On flew the song, a giddy race,
 After the flying story ; word made leap
 Out word, rhyme—rhyme ; the lay could barely keep
 Pace with the action visibly rushing past :
 Both ended. Back fell Naddo more aghast
 Than some Egyptian from the harassed bull
 That wheeled abrupt and, bellowing, fronted full 90
 His plague, who spied a scarab 'neath the tongue,
 And found 'twas Apis' flank his hasty prong
 Insulted.¹ But the people—but the cries,
 The crowding round, and proffering the prize !
 —For he had gained some prize. He seemed to shrink
 Into a sleepy cloud, just at whose brink
 One sight withheld him. There sat Adelaide,
 Silent ; but at her knees the very maid
His Of the North Chamber, her red lips as rich,
triumph The same pure fleecy hair² ; one weft of which, 100
 Golden and great, quite touched his cheek as o'er
 She leant, speaking some six words and no more.
 He answered something, anything ; and she
 Unbound a scarf and laid it heavily
 Upon him, her neck's warmth and all. Again
 Moved the arrested magic ; in his brain
 Noises grew, and a light that turned to glare,
 And greater glare, until the intense flare
 Engulfed him, shut the whole scene from his sense.
 And when he woke 'twas many a furlong thence, 110
 At home ; the sun shining his ruddy wont ;
 The customary birds'-chirp ; but his front
 Was crowned—was crowned ! Her scented scarf around
 His neck ! Whose gorgeous vesture heaps the ground ?
 A prize ? He turned, and peeringly on him
 Brooded the women-faces, kind and dim,
 Ready to talk—" The Jongleurs in a troop

89. some] your . . . 90. wheeled] wheels . . . fronted] fronts.
 100. weft] curl.

¹ Apis, an Egyptian god supposed to dwell in the body of certain oxen, known by distinguishing marks, including a knot beneath the tongue in the form of the sacred beetle (scarab).

² Bk. i. 752.

" Had brought him back, Naddo and Squarcialupe Book II
 " And Tagliafer ; how strange ! a childhood spent
 " In taking, well for him, so brave a bent ! 120
 " Since Eglamor," they heard, " was dead with spite,
 " And Palma chose him for her minstrel."

Light

Sordello rose—to think, now ; hitherto He be-
 He had perceived. Sure, a discovery grew gins to
 Out of it all ! Best live from first to last think
 The transport o'er again. A week he passed,
 Sucking the sweet out of each circumstance,
 From the bard's outbreak to the luscious trance
 Bounding his own achievement. Strange ! A man
 Recounted an adventure, but began 130
 Imperfectly ; his own task was to fill
 The frame-work up, sing well what he sung ill,
 Supply the necessary points, set loose What
 As many incidents of little use caused
 —More imbecile the other, not to see his
 Their relative importance clear as he ¹ ! triumph
 But, for a special pleasure in the act
 Of singing—had he ever turned, in fact,
 From Elys, to sing Elys ² ?—from each fit

120. In taking] Assuming. 130. an . . .] that; but] and.
 132. sing] sang, 1840 and 1863 edition.

¹ The first question that occurs to him is what was so wonderful about his performance ? To Sordello it seemed the plain thing to do—Eglamor's song was so obviously unfinished and imperfect ; what more natural than that he should put it right ? He had yet to learn the extent of his own gifts and his superiority to the mass of mankind. The pronouns here are confusing. A man recounted an adventure but imperfectly—Sordello's task had been to fill the framework up, etc., etc.—more imbecile the other not to see their relative importance as clear as Sordello did.

² Sordello as yet knew nothing of "form." With him the thought and its expression were one and the same thing. Later on he realized the technical difficulties of his art. See lines 488-500, 574 ff. He could not understand anyone (like Eglamor) having to get his ideas first and put them into rhyme afterwards. He had never turned from Elys the thought to construct Elys the completed song. The conception and its execution were with him a single act. He little knew the difficulties which the momentary inspiration had enabled him to overcome, and in consequence scoffed at the laboured effort of Eglamor.

Book II Of rapture to contrive a song of it ? 140

True, this snatch or the other seemed to wind
 Into a treasure, helped himself to find
 A beauty in himself ; for, see, he soared
 By means of that mere snatch, to many a hoard
 Of fancies ; as some falling cone bears soft
 The eye along the fir-tree-spire, aloft
 To a dove's nest. Then, how divine the cause
 Why such performance should exact applause
 From men, if they had fancies too ? Did fate
 Decree they found a beauty separate 150
 In the poor snatch itself ?—" Take Elys, there,
 "—" Her head that's sharp and perfect like a pear,
 " " So close and smooth are laid the few fine locks
 " " Coloured like honey oozed from topmost rocks
 " " Sun-blanced the livelong summer '—if they heard
 " Just those two rhymes, assented at my word,
 " And loved them as I love them who have run
 " These fingers through those pale locks, let the sun
 " Into the white cool skin—who first could clutch,
 " Then praise—I needs must be a god to such.¹ 160
 " Or what if some, above themselves, and yet
 " Beneath me, like their Eglamor, have set
 " An impress on our gift ? So, men believe
 " And worship what they know not, nor receive
 " Delight from. Have they fancies—slow, perchance,
 " Not at their beck, which indistinctly glance
 " Until, by song, each floating part be linked
 " To each, and all grow palpable, distinct ? "
 He pondered this.

The Ex-
 planation

Meanwhile, sounds low and drear
 Stole on him, and a noise of footsteps, near 170
 And nearer, while the underwood was pushed
 Aside, the larches grazed, the dead leaves crushed
 At the approach of men. The wind seemed laid ;

145. soft] oft. 148. Why such] Such a. 151. Take Elys]
 Our Elys . . . 158. pale] fine.

159. Who first could clutch] nay, thus I clutch
 Then praise } Those locks !
 161. what if some] if some few. 171. while] and.

¹ Sordello's creations were as real to him as the material world around him. His power of visualizing his mental conceptions was the great secret of his success as a singer.

Only, the trees shrunk slightly and a shade
 Came o'er the sky although 'twas midday yet :
 You saw each half-shut downcast floweret
 Flutter—"a Roman bride, when they'd dispart
 " Her unbound tresses with the Sabine dart,¹
 " Holding that famous rape in memory still,
 " Felt creep into her curls the iron chill, 180
 " And looked thus," Eglamor would say—indeed
 'Tis Eglamor, no other, these precede
 Home hither in the woods. " 'Twere surely sweet
 " Far from the scene of one's forlorn defeat
 " To sleep ! " judged Naddo, who in person led
 Jongleurs and Trouveres, chanting at their head,
 A scanty company ; for, sooth to say,
 Our beaten Troubadour had seen his day.
 Old worshippers were something shamed, old friends
 Nigh weary ; still the death proposed amends. 190
 " Let us but get them safely through my song
 " And home again ! " quoth Naddo.

All along,

This man (they rest the bier upon the sand)
 —This calm corpse with the loose flowers in his hand,
 Eglamor, lived Sordello's opposite.²

176. floweret] violet. 177. they'd] they . . .

¹ The Sabines are celebrated in history as the first race who took up arms against the Romans to avenge the rape of their women at a spectacle to which they had been invited. The memory of this was kept up in the custom alluded to in the text to impress the bride with the Sabine ideal of female honour. The notion of nature shuddering at the approach of the dead poet, as the bride might at the thought of what awaited her if she was untrue to her marriage vow, was the kind of far-fetched conceit for which Eglamor had rather a weakness.

² The essential difference between Eglamor and Sordello lay in this : that to Eglamor Song was an end in itself, to Sordello it was but a means. To Eglamor Art brought its own reward, it marked him a man apart, he loved Art for Art's sake. He shrunk even from his own highest, for he dare not "leave the ground to lose himself in the sky," afraid of "moving about in worlds not realized." To Sordello song was but a medium of expression for the revelation to mankind of the depths of his own soul. Poets such as Eglamor are of that weaker class described in Bk. i. 506-516. Sordello is represented as one of the first poets to lift his art from the mere ballad or story-telling stage to a higher level and give to it a didactic purpose. He sought to raise mankind through the double medium of

Book II For him indeed was Naddo's notion right,
 And verse a temple-worship vague and vast,
 Eglamor A ceremony that withdrew the last
 as poet Opposing bolt, looped back the lingering veil
 Which hid the holy place : should one so frail 200
 Stand there without such effort ? or repine
 If much was blank, uncertain at the shrine
 He knelt before, till, soothed by many a rite,
 The power responded, and some sound or sight
 Grew up, his own forever, to be fixed,
 In rhyme, the beautiful, forever !—mixed
 With his own life, unloosed when he should please,
 Having it safe at hand, ready to ease
 All pain, remove all trouble ; every time
 He loosed that fancy from its bonds of rhyme, 210
 (Like Perseus when he loosed his naked love)¹
 Faltering ; so distinct and far above
 Himself, these fancies ! He, no genius rare,
 Transfiguring in fire or wave or air
 At will, but a poor gnome that, cloistered up
 In some rock-chamber with his agate cup,
 His topaz rod, his seed-pearl, in these few
 And their arrangement finds enough to do
 For his best art.² Then, how he loved that art !
 The calling marking him a man apart 220
 From men—one not to care, take counsel for
 Cold hearts, comfortless faces—(Eglamor

self-revelation expressed in song. Eglamor's strong point was his reverence and his unselfish appreciation of others, as, for instance, his generous recognition of Sordello's victory in the prize song. It was this which saved him in Browning's estimation. See Bk. vi. line 798 ff.

¹ Andromeda was chained to a rock as a sacrifice to a sea monster, thus to appease the wrath of Neptune, and was rescued by Perseus. Cf. description in *Pauline*—

" As she awaits the snake on the wet beach,
 By the dark rock and the white wave just breaking
 At her feet : quite naked and alone : a thing
 You doubt not, fear not for, secure that God
 Will come in thunder from the stars to save her."

² This is a good example of how Browning sometimes sacrifices sense and aptness of illustration to the charm of his own fancy. The picture is delightful, but poor as a simile. Similarly the picture of the bat which follows, which is most certainly too strong a condemnation.

Book II
His pride
in his Art

Was neediest of his tribe)—since verse, the gift,
Was his, and men, the whole of them, must shift
Without it, e'en content themselves with wealth
And pomp and power, snatching a life by stealth.
So, Eglamor was not without his pride !
The sorriest bat which cowers throughout noontide
While other birds are jocund, has one time
When moon and stars are blinded, and the prime 230
Of earth is his to claim, nor find a peer ;
And Eglamor was noblest poet here—
He well knew, 'mid those April woods he cast
Conceits upon in plenty as he passed,
That Naddo might suppose him not to think
Entirely on the coming triumph : wink
At the one weakness¹ ! 'Twas a fervid child,
That song of his ; no brother of the guild
Had e'er conceived its like. The rest you know,
The exaltation and the overthrow : 240
Our poet lost his purpose, lost his rank,
His life—to that it came. Yet envy sank
Within him, as he heard Sordello out,
And, for the first time, shouted—tried to shout
Like others, not from any zeal to show
Pleasure that way : the common sort did so,
What else was Eglamor ? who, bending down
As they, placed his beneath Sordello's crown,
Printed a kiss on his successor's hand,
Left one great tear on it, then joined his band² 250
—In time ; for some were watching at the door :
Who knows what envy may effect ? " Give o'er,
" Nor charm his lips, nor craze him ! " (here one spied
And disengaged the withered crown)—" Beside
" His crown ? How prompt and clear those verses rang

Story of
his death

228. throughout] through . . . 231. his] its . . . 233. He
well knew 'mid] He knew among the . . . 247. What else]
And what . . . 248. As they] The same . . . 255. rang . . .
sang] rung, sung.

¹ His pride. See line 70.

² In justice to Eglamor it should be realized that his admiration of Sordello is genuine. Though Sordello's success has ruined his own prestige, yet he recognizes his master. His pride in his art and his local pre-eminence is, under the spell of Sordello's genius, melted into admiration and humility—but his eclipse killed him.

BOOK II "To answer yours! nay, sing them!" And he sang
 Them calmly. Home he went; friends used to wait
 His coming, zealous to congratulate;
 But, to a man—so quickly runs report—
 Could do no less than leave him, and escort 260
 His rival. That eve, then, bred many a thought:
 What must his future life be? was he brought
 So low, who stood so lofty this Spring morn?
 At length he said, "Best sleep now with my scorn.
 "And by to-morrow I devise some plain
 "Expedient!" So, he slept, nor woke again.
 They found as much, those friends, when they returned
 O'erflowing with the marvels they had learned
 About Sordello's paradise, his roves
 Among the hills and vales and plains and groves, 270
 Wherein, no doubt, this lay was roughly cast,
 Polished by slow degrees, completed last
 To Eglamor's discomfiture and death.¹

Such form the chanters now, and, out of breath,
 They lay the beaten man in his abode,
 Naddo reciting that same luckless ode,
 Doleful to hear. Sordello could explore
 By means of it, however, one step more
 In joy; and, mastering the round at length,
 Learnt how to live in weakness as in strength,² 280
 When from his covert forth he stood, addressed
 Eglamor, bade the tender ferns invest,
 Sordello Primæval pines o'er canopy his couch,
 at the And, most of all, his fame—(shall I avouch
 grave Eglamor heard it, dead though he might look,

258. zealous] anxious. 263. stood] was. 270. vales and] valleys.

¹ This view was, of course, quite wrong. Naddo and his friends had no idea of a natural poet, a born genius like Sordello, and imagined his impromptu song to be the outcome of laborious toil and study like their own efforts.

² Eglamor had the faults of mediocrity. He cherished his reputation, was proud and loved his art for the position it gave him. His reputation gone, his heart broke. Sordello saw the lesson pointed by Eglamor's failure, and realized that if he would triumph he must be above both apparent success and failure. It cost him his life, but he was faithful at the last. I take it that what Naddo recited was Eglamor's prize song—not an original effort. Had Sordello held to the line this moment of clear vision gave him he would not have failed as he did.

And laughed ¹ as from his brow Sordello took
The crown, and laid on the bard's breast, and said
It was a crown, now, fit for poet's head ² ?)

—Continue. Nor the prayer quite fruitless fell.

A plant they have, yielding a three-leaved bell 290
Which whitens at the heart ere noon, and ails
Till evening ; evening gives it to her gales
To clear away with such forgotten things
As are an eyesore to the morn : this brings
Him to their mind, and bears his very name.³

So much for Eglamor. My own month came ⁴ ;
'Twas a sunrise of blossoming and May.

Beneath a flowering laurel thicket lay
Sordello ; each new sprinkle of white stars ⁵
That smell fainter of wine than Massic jars 300
Dug up at Baiæ, when the south wind shed
The ripest, made him happier ; filleted
And robed the same, only a lute beside
Lay on the turf. Before him far and wide
The country stretched : Goito slept behind
—The castle and its covert, which confined
Him with his hopes and fears ; so fain of old
To leave the story of his birth untold.

At intervals, 'spite the fantastic glow
Of his Apollo-life, a certain low 310
And wretched whisper, winding through the bliss,
Admonished, no such fortune could be his,
All was quite false and sure to fade one day :
The closelier drew he round him his array

287. laid on the bard's breast] laid it on his breast.

¹ Eglamor knew now the value of earthly crowns.

² Fit, because won by his own greatness ; rendered of still greater value because willingly admitted by the unselfishness of Eglamor and finally consecrated by death.

³ The flower "Eglamor" is still unidentified. Mr Birrell's conjecture "S. Bruno's lily" seems to me unsatisfactory.

⁴ Browning was born on May 7th, 1812.

⁵ The same thought occurs only in English dress in *Home Thoughts from Abroad*—

" And after April when May follows
And the whitethroat builds and all the swallows
Hark, where my blossomed pear-tree in the hedge
Leans to the field and scatters on the clover
Blossoms and dew-drops . . .

BOOK II Of brilliance to expel the truth. But when
 A reason for his difference from men
 Surprised him at the grave, he took no rest
 While aught of that old life, superbly dressed
 Down to its meanest incident, remained
 Sordello A mystery : alas, they soon explained 320
 learns his Away Apollo ! and the tale amounts
 history To this : when at Vicenza ¹ both her counts
 Banished the Vivaresi kith and kin,
 Those Maltraversi hung on Ecelin,
 Reviled him as he followed ; he for spite
 Must fire their quarter, though that self-same night
 Among the flames young Ecelin was born
 Of Adelaide, there too, and barely torn
 From the roused populace hard on the rear,
 By a poor archer when his chieftain's fear 330
 The ex- Grew high ; into the thick Elcorte leapt,
 pulsion Saved her, and died ; no creature left except
 His child to thank. And when the full escape
 Was known—how men impaled from chine to nape
 Unlucky Prata, all to pieces spurned
 Bishop Pistore's concubines, and burned
 Taurello's entire household, flesh and fell,
 Missing the sweeter prey—such courage well
 Might claim reward.² The orphan, ever since,
 Sordello, had been nurtured by his prince 340

325. Reviled him } Reviling. 331. Grew] Was.

¹ This was the historic expulsion of Ecelin and Taurello from Vicenza upon which the action of *Sordello* is based. The two counts here mentioned were probably Pilio Celsano and his son Count Albert, the former of whom was elected Podesta in this year by the party of the counts of Vicenza. These counts of Vicenza, whose family name was Beroaldi, were a branch of the Maltraversi family and the leaders of the faction opposing Ecelin and the counts of Vivaro. (See Pagliarini, *Storia di Vicenza*).

² The story was correct enough except in the matter of Sordello's parentage, which Adelaide concealed for her own reasons. See *Intro.*, Bk. i. § 6. The story is again related reminiscently by Taurello, Bk. iv. 698-750: "The sweeter prey," *i.e.* Taurello himself. In the article on Sordello in the *Biographie Universelle* it is mentioned that Sordello was said by some to have been born "dans le Mantouan d'un pauvre chevalier nommé Elcort." Browning probably drew the name from this source.

Within a blind retreat where Adelaide—
 (For, once this notable discovery made,
 The past at every point was understood)
 —Might harbour easily when times were rude,
 When Azzo schemed for Palma, to retrieve
 That pledge of Agnes Este—loth to leave
 Mantua unguarded with a vigilant eye,
 While there Taurello bode ambiguously—¹
 He who could have no motive now to moil
 For his own fortunes since their utter spoil—
 As it were worth while yet (went the report)
 To disengage himself from her. In short,
 Apollo vanished ; a mean youth, just named
 His lady's minstrel, was to be proclaimed
 —How shall I phrase it ?—Monarch of the World !
 For, on the day when that array was furled
 Forever, and in place of one a slave
 To longings, wild indeed, but longings save
 In dreams as wild, suppressed—one daring not
 Assume the mastery such dreams allot,
 Until a magical equipment, strength,
 Grace, wisdom, decked him too,—he chose at length,
 Content with unproved wits and failing frame,
 In virtue of his simple will, to claim
 That mastery, no less—to do his best
 With means so limited,² and let the rest
 Go by,—the seal was set : never again

350

360

Sordello's
claim

344. Might] Can . . . 345. Azzo] Este.

345-348. These lines read in 1st edition—

"When Este schemes for Palma—would retrieve
 That pledge, when Mantua is not fit to leave
 Longer unguarded with a vigilant eye
 Taurello bides there so ambiguously—"

354. For] But . .

¹ Two reasons there were for Adelaide's conduct: Taurello might be tampered with by the Guelf faction, and he might meet and recognize his son Sordello. Azzo wanted to marry his ally Boniface to Palma "to retrieve the pledge," *i.e.* to get back an equivalent for Agnes Este's marriage with Ecelin. Probably a question of dowry, that the lands Ecelin got with Agnes might come back to the Guelfs through the daughter's marriage with Boniface.

² The magnitude of Sordello's claim was increased by the fact that the two ordinary avenues to prominence—physical prowess and high birth—were for him cut off. His physical

- Book II Sordello could in his own sight remain
 One of the many, one with hopes and cares
 And interests nowise distinct from theirs, 370
 Only peculiar in a thriveless store
 Of fancies, which were fancies and no more,
 Never again for him and for the crowd
 A common law was challenged and allowed
 If calmly reasoned of, howe'er denied
 By a mad impulse nothing justified
 Short of Apollo's presence. The divorce
 Is clear : why needs Sordello square his course
 By any known example ? Men no more
 Compete with him than tree and flower before. 380
 Himself, inactive, yet is greater far
 Than such as act, each stooping to his star,
 Acquiring thence his function ; he has gained
 The same result with meaner mortals trained
 To strength or beauty, moulded to express
 Sordello : Each the idea that rules him ; since no less
 the uni- He comprehends that function, but can still
 versal Embrace the others, take of might his fill
 sympa- With Richard as of grace with Palma, mix
 thizer Their qualities, or for a moment fix 390
 On one ; abiding free meantime, uncramped
 By any partial organ, never stamped
 Strong, and to strength turning all energies—
 Wise, and restricted to becoming wise—
 That is, he loves not, nor possesses One
 Idea that, star-like over, lures him on
 Sordello To its exclusive purpose.¹ " Fortunate !
 loq.

393 and] so .

weakness debarred him from success as a man of action, his (supposed) ignoble birth from position and influence.

¹This ubiquitous sympathy or power of appreciating the peculiar pleasure derived from the exercise of any particular attribute, such as grace or wisdom or strength, yet without any standard of their relative value by which to judge them, Sordello considered to be his main strength. By means of this power he was to get in touch with each human soul, and by the display through his own personality of the possibilities of these attributes raise each individual to his highest level. See ll. 440-445. Yet it was this very width of sympathy and want of a central idea behind it which proved his fundamental weakness. When he came to put his theory in practice, having no touchstone by

" This flesh of mine ne'er strove to emulate
 " A soul so various—took no casual mould
 " Of the first fancy and, contracted, cold, 400
 " Clogged her forever—soul averse to change
 " As flesh : whereas flesh leaves soul free to range,
 " Remains itself a blank, cast into shade,
 " Encumbers little, if it cannot aid.
 " So, range, free soul !—who by self-consciousness,
 " The last drop of all beauty dost express—
 " The grace of seeing grace, a quintessence
 " For thee : while for the world, that can dispense
 " Wonder on men who, themselves, wonder—make
 " A shift to love at second-hand, and take 410
 " For idols those who do but idolize,
 " Themselves,—the world that counts men strong or wise,
 " Who, themselves, court strength, wisdom,—it shall
 bow
 " Surely in unexampled worship now,
 " Discerning me ! "—

(Dear monarch, I beseech,

Notice how lamentably wide a breach
 Is here : discovering this, discover too
 What our poor world has possibly to do
 With it ! As pigmy natures as you please—
 So much the better for you ; take your ease, 420
 Look on, and laugh ; style yourself God alone ;
 Strangle some day with a cross olive-stone !
 All that is right enough : but why want us
 To know that you yourself know thus and thus ¹ ?)

Browning
criticizes

401-402. reads—

" Lay clogged forever thence, averse to change
 As that. Whereas it left her free to range . . ."

405. free] my . . . 409. who . . .] themselves that wonder.

411-3] " Those for its idols who but idolize

Themselves—that loves the soul as strong as wise
 Whose love is strength, is wisdom—such shall bow."

which to prove the various and often contradictory beliefs and opinions of others, he was led into a state of mental chaos and became incapable of guiding anyone and even of controlling himself.

¹ Browning appears several times in the poem as the critic of his own creation. The last half of the third book is an example of this being a personal discussion, having nothing to do with *Sordello*.

Book II " The world shall bow to me conceiving all
 Sordello " Man's life, who see its blisses, great and small,
 again " Afar—not tasting any ; no machine
 " To exercise my utmost will is mine :
 " Be mine mere consciousness ! Let men perceive
 " What I could do, a mastery believe, 430
 " Asserted and established to the throng
 " By their selected evidence of song
 " Which now shall prove, whate'er they are, or seek
 " To be, I am—whose words, not actions speak,
 " Who change no standards of perfection, vex
 " With no strange forms created to perplex,
 " But just perform their bidding and no more,
 As Al- " At their own satiating-point give o'er,
 truist " While each shall love in me the love that leads
 " His soul to power's perfection." ¹ Song, not deeds, 440
 (For we get tired) was chosen. Fate would brook
 Mankind no other organ ; he would look
 For not another channel to dispense
 His own volition by, receive men's sense
 His Of its supremacy—would live content,
 medium Obstructed else, with merely verse for vent.
 Song Nor should, for instance, strength an outlet seek
 And, striving, be admired : nor grace bespeak
 Wonder, displayed in gracious attitudes :
 Nor wisdom, poured forth, change unseemly moods ; 450
 But he would give and take on song's one point.
 Like some huge throbbing stone that, poised a-joint,
 Sounds, to affect on its basaltic bed,

425. Nay finish . . . Bow to me, etc. . . . 429.] Therefore
 mere consciousness for me—Perceive. 434. whose words] who
 take no pains to speak . . . 434. just] mean. 439. While]
 And . . . 440. power's] its . . . 444. by] and . . . 445.
 supremacy] existing.

¹ The blend in Sordello of egoist and altruist makes it difficult
 to determine his character. The nobility of his desire to raise
 mankind is constantly neutralized and obscured by his thirst
 for appreciation and his craving for joy. Yet it was genuine
 enough. The supreme lesson of humility which eventually
 struggled through the enveloping clouds of unchecked indi-
 vidualism and shed a ray of true light into his soul came only at
 the close of his life. Even then he never reached the height
 which can exclaim, "If I must needs glory I will glory in those
 things which concern mine infirmities."

Must sue in just one accent ; tempests shed
Thunder, and raves the windstorm : only let
That key by any little noise be set—
The far benighted hunter's halloo pitch
On that, the hungry curlew chance to scritch
Or serpent hiss it, rustling through the rift,
However loud, however low—all lift 460
The groaning monster, stricken to the heart.

Lo ye, the world's concernment, for its part,
And this, for his, will hardly interfere !
Its businesses in blood and blaze this year
But wile the hour away—a pastime slight
Till he shall step upon the platform : right !
And, now thus much is settled, cast in rough,
Proved feasible, be counselled ! thought enough,—
Slumber, Sordello ! any day will serve :
Were it a less digested plan ! how swerve 470
To-morrow ? Meanwhile eat these sun-dried grapes,
And watch the soaring hawk there ! Life escapes
Merrily thus.¹

He thoroughly read o'er
His truchman Naddo's missive six times more,
Praying him visit Mantua and supply
A famished world. Naddo's
letter

The evening star was high
When he reached Mantua,² but his fame arrived
Before him : friends applauded, foes connived
And Naddo looked an angel, and the rest
Angels, and all these angels would be blest 480
Supremely by a song—the thrice-renowned
Goito-manufacture. Then he found
(Casting about to satisfy the crowd)
That happy vehicle, so late allowed,
Sordello
in Man-
tua

455. windstorm] landstorm.

¹ It is typical of Sordello that, having decided to adopt song as his mode of expression, and hastily sketched to himself how he will use it, that he takes for granted the success and imagines that having got thus far any time will do to begin and that such things as difficulty or failure do not exist—he was soon rudely awakened to their reality.

² Cf. *Lycidas*—

“Oft till the star that shines at evening bright
Towards heaven's descent had sloped his westering wheel.”

BOOK II A sore annoyance ¹ ; 'twas the song's effect
 He cared for, scarce the song itself : reflect !
 His In the past life, what might be singing's use ?
 diffi- Just to delight his Delians, whose profuse
 culties Praise, not the toilsome process which procured
 That praise, enticed Apollo : dreams abjured, 490
 No overleaping means for ends—take both
 For granted or take neither ² ! I am loth
 To say the rhymes at last were Eglamor's ;
 But Naddo, chuckling,³ bade competitors
 Go pine ; " the master certes meant to waste
 " No effort, cautiously had probed the taste
 " He'd please anon : true bard, in short,—disturb
 Naddo " His title if they could ; nor spur nor curb,
 explains " Fancy nor reason, wanting in him ; whence
 " The staple of his verses, common sense : 500
 " He built on man's broad nature—gift of gifts,
 " That power to build ! The world contented shifts
 " With counterfeits enough, a dreary sort
 " Of warriors, statesmen, ere it can extort
 " Its poet-soul—that's after all, a freak,
 " (The having eyes to see and tongue to speak) ⁴
 " With our herd's stupid sterling happiness
 " So plainly incompatible that—yes—

¹ On Sordello's difficulties, see Introduction, Bk. ii. § 5. The more immediate ones when once he began life as a troubadour were technical—thought, language and expression ; the deeper ones arose from the clash of his predetermined ideals with the plain facts of experience.

² In singing to his " Delians," the creations of his own brain, words did not matter : whether he actually translated his thoughts into words or not, and whether when he did so they were intelligible or not, he could always *imagine* a great success ; but now, in dealing with men and women, he had to find words and thoughts and rhythm or he could get no applause at all !

³ Naddo, who had no doubt been enlarging upon the wonders of Sordello's art to the people, is not a little disturbed to find that Sordello's very first effort is little better than a *réchauffé* of one of Eglamor's songs. Having in a sense gone sponsor for Sordello, he has to explain to the people Sordello's apparent lack of originality, which he does on the grounds that, with true artistic instinct, Sordello gives them only what they can understand. He nevertheless is not a little amused and gratified at Sordello's shortcomings. The depreciation of greatness is always dear to the commonplace mind.

⁴ An ironical Browning comment.

“ Yes—should a son of his improve the breed
 “ And turn out poet, he were cursed indeed ! ”
 “ Well, there’s Goito and its woods anon,
 “ If the worst happen ; best go stoutly on
 “ Now ! ” thought Sordello.

Book II

510

Ay, and goes on yet !

You pother with your glossaries to get
 A notion of the Troubadour’s intent
 In rondel, tenzon, virlai or sirvent—¹
 Much as you study arras how to twirl
 His angelot, plaything of page and girl
 Once ; but you surely reach, at last,—or, no !
 Never quite reach what struck the people so,
 As from the welter of their time he drew
 Its elements successively to view,
 Followed all actions backward on their course,
 And catching up, unmingled at the source,
 Such a strength, such a weakness, added then
 A touch or two, and turned them into men.
 Virtue took form, nor vice refused a shape ;
 Here heaven opened, there was hell agape,
 As Saint this simpered past in sanctity,
 Sinner the other flared portentous by
 A greedy people. Then why stop, surprised
 At his success ? The scheme was realized
 Too suddenly in one respect ² : a crowd
 Praising, eyes quick to see, and lips as loud
 To speak, delicious homage to receive,

The Art
 of the
 Trouba-
 dour

520

530

511. and its woods anon] to retire upon. 516. rondel, tenzon]
 rondels, tenzons.

¹ The sirvente and the tenzon were forms of Troubadour poetry. The former, which was used chiefly as a war-song or a satire, was very elastic in metre and of no very definite form. It was used to censure political and social disorders and as a means of bringing grievances before the attention of the public. The tenzon or contention was a dialogue between two troubadours, in the course of which the two combatants maintained alternately different sides of some question of love or chivalry, using the same stanzas and rhymes. The virlai or virelai and the rondel were shorter forms and of French origin.

² Sordello’s difficulties and failure, enlarged upon at great length in the poem, must not blind us to the fact of his success. It was only from his own lofty standpoint that he failed ; from the standpoint of the populace—as a troubadour, that is—he was a marvel.

Book II The woman's breath to feel upon his sleeve,
 Who said, " But Anafest—why asks he less
 " Than Lucio, in your verses ¹? how confess,
 " It seemed too much but yestereve! "—the youth,
 His first Who bade him earnestly, " Avow the truth! 540
 successes " You love Bianca, surely, from your song;
 " I knew I was unworthy! "—soft or strong,
 In poured such tributes ere he had arranged
 Ethereal ways to take them, sorted, changed,
 Digested. Courted thus at unawares,
 In spite of his pretensions and his cares,
 He caught himself shamefully hankering
 And After the obvious petty joys that spring
 their From true life, fain relinquish pedestal
 effect And condescend with pleasures—one and all 550
 To be renounced, no doubt; for, thus to chain
 Himself to single joys and so refrain
 From tasting their quintessence, frustrates, sure,
 His prime design; each joy must he abjure
 Even for love of it.

He laughed ²: what sage
 But perishes if from his magic page
 He look because, at the first line, a proof
 'Twas heard salutes him from the cavern roof?
 On! Give yourself, excluding aught beside,
 " To the day's task; compel your slave provide 560
 " Its utmost at the soonest; turn the leaf
 " Thoroughly conned. These lays of yours, in brief—
 " Cannot men bear, now, something better?—fly
 " A pitch beyond this unreal pageantry
 " Of essences? the period sure has ceased
 " For such: present us with ourselves, at least,
 " Not portions of ourselves, mere loves and hates

536. The woman's] Bianca's . . . 544. Ethereal] Etherial.
 548. The] your . . . 549. true] real. 559. yourself] thyself.
 So throughout passage.

¹ *I.e.* Why does my lover (Anafest) ask less of me than the Lucio of your verses did of his love?

² It was the laugh of a man intoxicated by sudden and immediate success and in danger of losing his better judgment. The road to real success is long and difficult: Sordello could do much better than this if he persevered. It was the first temptation to stop at the wayside and forego the long road he knew lay before him.

"Made flesh : wait not !"

Book II

Awhile the poet waits

However. The first trial was enough :

He left imagining, to try the stuff

570

That held the imaged thing, and, let it writhe

Never so fiercely, scarce allowed a tithe

To reach the light—his Language. How he sought

The diffi-
culty of
ex-
pression

The cause, conceived a cure, and slow re-wrought

That Language,—welding words into the crude

Mass from the new speech round him, till a rude

Armour was hammered out, in time to be

Approved beyond the Roman panoply

Melted to make it,—boots not.¹ This obtained

With some ado, no obstacle remained

580

To using it ; accordingly he took

An action with its actors, quite forsook

Himself to live in each, returned anon

With the result—a creature, and, by one

And one, proceeded leisurely to equip

Its limbs in harness of his workmanship.

"Accomplished ! Listen, Mantuans !" Fond essay !

Piece after piece that armour broke away,

Because perceptions whole, like that he sought

To clothe, reject so pure a work of thought

590

As language : thought may take perception's place

But hardly co-exist in any case,

He tries
his new
language
in dra-
matic
form

Being its mere presentment—of the whole

By parts, the simultaneous and the sole

By the successive and the many. Lacks

The crowd perception ? painfully it tacks

596. perception] perceptions.

¹ In Sordello's influence on the Italian tongue Browning has made use of a hint from Dante. See Plumptre's *Dante, Purg.*, c. vii. l. 16, where Sordello, finding that the spirit who accosts him is Virgil, says—

" 'O glory of the Latins,' said he, 'whence
Was shown the might of what our speech could do ;
Source of my native land's pre-eminence,
What grace or merit brings thee to my view ?'"

Upon which lines Plumptre remarks : " The Lombard Provençal poet does not cease to feel that he too has a share in the Latin which Virgil wrote, and of which he had shown the capacity for the highest poetry. Sordello's influence is also mentioned by Dante in his prose treatise, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*

BOOK II Thought to thought, which Sordello, needing such,
 but fails Has rent perception into : it's to clutch
 And reconstruct—his office to diffuse,
 Destroy : as hard, then, to obtain a Muse 600
 As to become Apollo.¹ " For the rest,
 " E'en if some wondrous vehicle expressed
 " The whole dream, what impertinence in me
 " So to express it, who myself can be
 " The dream ! nor, on the other hand, are those
 " I sing to, over-likely to suppose
 " A higher than the highest I present
 " Now, which they praise already : be content
 " Both parties, rather—they with the old verse,
 " And I with the old praise—far go, fare worse ! " 610
 A few adhering rivets loosed, upsprings
 The angel, sparkles off his mail, which rings,
 Whirled from each delicatest limb it warps ;
 So might Apollo from the sudden corpse
 Of Hyacinth have cast his luckless quoits.²
 He set to celebrating the exploits
 Of Montfort o'er the Mountaineers.³

Then came

597. Thought to thought] Together thoughts which . . .
 600. As hard] as difficult obtain a Muse . . . in short, as the
 Apollo. 608. which] and. 614. So] as.

¹ Having rewrought his language, Sordello tries to present a whole scene or drama to the people. The attempt, however, is a failure—you cannot represent simultaneous action by successive representation. The people cannot follow him, not having Sordello's grasp of the whole idea. He perforce must fall back on the old familiar narrative. He comforts himself with the thought that to one so great as he is, who can actually be what he conceives, even if he could present it, it would be an impertinence. The passage may, however, mean that Sordello tried to put before the people an ideal figure who represented the combined characteristics of half a dozen of his former single heroes, but being too complex in idea no one understood it.

² Hyacinth was a youth beloved of Apollo and Zephyrus : he returned the former's love and Zephyrus became jealous. As they played at quoits Zephyrus blew Apollo's against Hyacinth and killed him. Just as Apollo might have hurled his luckless quoits to the winds, so Sordello flung aside his attempt at dramatic representation and returned to the commonplace narrative of Montfort.

³ Simon de Montfort, the father of the famous English baron of the same name, was the leader in the crusade against the

The world's revenge : their pleasure, now his aim
 Merely,—what was it ? “ Not to play the fool
 “ So much as learn our lesson in your school ! ”¹
 Replied the world. He found that, every time
 He gained applause by any ballad-rhyme,
 His auditory recognized no jot
 As he intended, and, mistaking not
 Him for his meanest hero, ne'er was dunce
 sufficient to believe him—all, at once.²
 His will . . . conceive it caring for his will !
 —Mantuans, the main of them, admiring still
 How a mere singer, ugly, stunted, weak,
 Had Montfort at completely (so to speak)
 His fingers' ends ; while past the praise-tide swept
 To Montfort, either's share distinctly kept :
 The true meed for true merit !—his abates
 Into a sort he most repudiates,
 And on them angrily he turns.³ Who were
 The Mantuans, after all, that he should care
 About their recognition, ay or no ?
 In spite of the convention months ago,
 (Why blink the truth ?) was not he forced to help
 This same ungrateful audience, every whelp
 Of Naddo's litter, make them pass for peers
 With the bright band of old Goito years,
 As erst he toiled for flower or tree ? Why, there

620 How the
 people
 mis-
 under-
 stood
 him

630

640

Sordello's
 anger at
 the Man-
 tuans

622. ballad rhyme] given rhyme. 642. old] those.

Albigensis, which took place in the South of France from 1210 to 1229. The Albigensis, who were charged with the Paulician heresy, so called probably from Paul of Samosata, a schismatic of the fourth century, were exterminated with ruthless severity. The subject would be a popular one with the Italian people and to Sordello's hearers of recent interest.

¹ *I.e.* “ Not to be so foolish as to go to school again to be taught by you.” This is Sordello's first real failure. He comes down from his attempt to teach the people and sings what they want, because he cannot do without praise and success.

² That is, all his heroes at once.

³ Sordello held that as the apprehension of noble attributes came from within, the measure of his greatness was identical with that of his heroes of romance, and that the multitude should in consequence transfer to him the applause they bestowed upon his creations. The fact that they did not was a bitter disappointment to him.

Book II Sat Palma ! Adelaide's funereal hair
 Ennobled the next corner.¹ Ay, he strewed
 A fairy dust upon that multitude,
 Although he feigned to take them by themselves ;
 His giants dignified those puny elves,
 Sublimed their faint applause. In short, he found
 Himself still footing a delusive round, 650
 Remote as ever from the self-display
 He meant to compass, hampered every way
 By what he hoped assistance.² Wherefore then
 Continue, make believe to find in men
 A use he found not ?
 Weeks, months, years went by
 And lo, Sordello vanished utterly,
 Sundered in twain ; each spectral part at strife
 With each ; one jarred against another life ;
 The Poet thwarting hopelessly the Man—³
 Who, fooled no longer, free in fancy ran 660
 Here, there : let slip no opportunities
 As pitiful, forsooth, beside the prize
 To drop on him some no-time and acquit
 His constant faith (the Poet's-half to wit—
 The Poet and the Man That waiving any compromise between
 No joy and all joy kept the hunger keen
 Beyond most methods)—of incurring scoff

644. Sat] sate.

¹ The forms and features of the crowd provided the raw material for his characters, which his fancy at once elevated and idealized ; my creations, thought Sordello, are too fine for such an audience.

² That is, the people themselves ; in Sordello's scheme they were the machinery for reflecting or demonstrating his sovereign will by which the world was to be reclaimed. They proved, however, far less receptive than he conceived, and became a hindrance, not a help. See l. 995.

³ As the applause fell off, and Sordello's popularity declined, the weak strain in his character appeared. Rather than not have appreciation he gave up his high aims and offered to sing as the people wanted. Then came "the world's revenge." They demanded the obvious and the commonplace : not the truth, but what was generally accepted as such ; and the effort to comply rent Sordello in twain. The man-part, weak and vain, complied ; the poet-half, strong and true, rebelled. The result was hopeless. The passage may well reflect something of Browning's own view as to the popular attitude towards his own previous poems, *Pauline* and *Paracelsus*, with their new form and language and transcendental outlook.

From the Man-portion—not to be put off
 With self-reflectings by the Poet's scheme,
 Though ne'er so bright. Why sauntered forth in
 dream, 670

Dressed any how, nor waited mystic frames,
 Immeasurable gifts, astounding claims,
 But just his sorry self?—who yet might be
 Sorrier for aught he in reality
 Achieved, so pinioned Man's the Poet-part,
 Fondling, in turn of fancy, verse; the Art
 Developing his soul a thousand ways—
 Potent, by its assistance, to amaze
 The multitude with majesties, convince
 Each sort of nature that the nature's prince 680
 Accosted it. Language, the makeshift, grew
 Into a bravest of expedients, too;
 Apollo, seemed it now, perverse had thrown
 Quiver and bow away,¹ the lyre alone
 Sufficed. While, out of dream, his day's work went
 To tune a crazy tenzon or sirvent—
 So hampered him the Man-part, thrust to judge
 Between the bard and the bard's audience, grudge
 A minute's toil that missed its due reward!
 But the complete Sordello, Man and Bard, 690
 John's cloud-girt angel, this foot on the land,
 That on the sea, with, open in his hand,
 A bitter-sweetling of a book²—was gone.

Then, if internal struggles to be one,
 Which frittered him incessantly piecemeal,
 Referred, ne'er so obliquely, to the real
 Intruding Mantuans! ever with some call
 To action while he pondered, once for all,
 Which looked the easier effort—to pursue
 This course, still leap o'er paltry joys, yearn through 700
 The present ill-appreciated stage

The Al-
 ternative

675. Man's] that. 680. the] same. 694. Then] And. 697.
 Intruding Mantuans] 1st edit. reversed.

¹ The Quiver and Bow symbolized the ideal of perfect physical manhood.

² "And I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven clothed with a cloud . . . and he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot in the sea and his left foot on the earth."—Rev. x. 2.

Book II Of self-revelment, and compel the age
 Know him—or else, forswearing bard-craft, wake
 From out his lethargy and nobly shake
 Off timid habits of denial, mix
 With men, enjoy like men. Ere he could fix
 On aught, in rushed the Mantuans ; much they cared
 For his perplexity ! Thus unprepared,
 The obvious if not only shelter lay
 In deeds, the dull conventions of his day 710
 Prescribed the like of him : why not be glad
 'Tis settled Palma's minstrel, good or bad,
 Submits to this and that established rule ?
 Let Vidal change, or any other fool,
 His murrey-coloured robe for filamot,
 And crop his hair ; too skin-deep, is it not,
 Such vigour ¹ ? Then, a sorrow to the heart,
 His talk ! ² Whatever topics they might start
 Had to be groped for in his consciousness

¹ Pierre Vidal, a troubadour who followed Richard I. to the Holy Land. He indulged in the wildest eccentricities, amongst others assuming the title of Emperor of the East. Possibly the allusion here is to this, that is, going from the glorious life of a bard to that of a mere civilian (*cf.* ii. 225-232), a common form of the vanity of the troubadours. Murrey-coloured is dark red, from Lat. *moro*, a moor, Ital. *morello* ; but here simply means coloured, as contrasted with *filamot*, *i.e.* dead-leaf coloured, "*feuille-morte*" (Sismondi, *Lit. S. Europe*, and *Johnson's Dict.*). The following description of the dress of the jongleurs may be given:—"They wore a hat with a peacock's feather standing to a great height above the crown ; a jacket tricked out with streaming ribbons, and decorated [down the front with rosettes of various colours. This jacket was generally made of some bright-hued material, such as grass-green or peach-coloured cloth ; hose and stockings of gaudy colours and large rosettes on their shoes" (Rowbotham, *Troubadours and Courts of Love*).

² The beliefs and opinions of ordinary people—of which Naddo is a type—are largely customary and traditional, the result of education and social intercourse. They accept the premisses and adopt the conclusions of their class on the principle of acceptance prior to investigation. Sordello, on the other hand, had come to no conclusions, for he was still searching for his premisses. Devoid of education, with such knowledge as he had acquired as yet undigested, astonishingly ignorant of human nature, yet with a singularly clear-sighted and receptive mind, he was no match for Naddo and the rest, with their sorted opinions and ready-made answers. He overlooked their horizon, and his replies were in consequence unintelligible to them. They thought him a fool, he knew they were—hardly a basis for mutual understanding.

Straight, and as straight delivered them by guess.
 Only obliged to ask himself, "What was,"
 A speedy answer followed ; but, alas,
 One of God's large ones, tardy to condense
 Itself into a period ; answers whence
 A tangle of conclusions must be stripped
 At any risk ere, trim to pattern clipped,
 They matched rare specimens the Mantuan flock
 Regaled him with, each talker from his stock,
 Of sorted-o'er opinions, every stage,
 Juicy in youth or desiccate with age,
 Fruits like the fig-tree's, rathe-ripe, rotten-rich,
 Sweet-sour, all tastes to take : a practice which
 He too had not impossibly attained,
 Once either of those fancy-flights restrained ;
 (For, at conjecture how might words appear
 To others, playing there what happened here,
 And occupied abroad by what he spurned
 At home, 'twas slipped, the occasion he returned
 To seize :) he'd strike that lyre adroitly—speech,
 Would but a twenty-cubit plectre reach ;
 A clever hand, consummate instrument,
 Were both brought close ; each excellency went
 For nothing, else. The question Naddo asked,
 Had just a lifetime moderately tasked
 To answer, Naddo's fashion. More disgust
 And more : why move his soul, since move it must
 At minute's notice or as good it failed
 To move at all ? The end was, he retailed
 Some ready-made opinion, put to use
 This quip, that maxim, ventured reproduce
 Gestures and tones—at any folly caught
 Serving to finish with, nor too much sought
 If false or true 'twas spoken ; praise and blame
 Of what he said grew pretty nigh the same
 —Meantime awards to meantime acts : his soul,
 Unequal to the compassing a whole,
 Saw, in a tenth part, less and less to strive
 About. And as for men in turn . . . contrive
 Who could to take eternal interest
 In them, so hate the worst, so love the best,

720 Book II
 The trial
 of con-
 versation

730

740

Sordello
 as man

. 750

760

720. Straight] strait. 735. might] the. 736. happened]
 passes.

Book II Though, in pursuance of his passive plan,
He hailed, decried, the proper way.

As Man

So figured he ; and how as Poet ? Verse
Came only not to a stand-still. The worse,

Sordello That his poor piece of daily work to do

as poet Was—not sink under any rivals ; who

Loudly and long enough, without these qualms,

Turned,¹ from Bocafoli's stark-naked psalms,

To Plara's sonnets spoil by toying with,

" As knops that stud some almug to the pith 770

His poet- " Prickèd for gum, wry thence, and crinklèd worse

rivals " Than pursèd eyelids of a river-horse

" Sunning himself o' the slime when whirrs the
breese "—

Gad-fly, that is.² He might compete with these !

But—but—

" Observe a pompion-twine afloat ;

" Pluck me one cup from off the castle-moat !

" Along with cup you raise leaf, stalk and root,

" The entire surface of the pool to boot.

" So could I pluck a cup, put in one song

" A single sight, did not my hand, too strong, 780

" Twitch in the least the root-strings of the whole.

" How should externals satisfy my soul ? "

" Why that's precise the error Squarcialupe "

(Hazardèd Naddo) " finds ; ' the man can't stoop

" ' To sing us out,' quoth he, ' a mere romance ;

" ' He'd fain do better than the best, enhance

" ' The subjects' rarity, work problems out

" ' Therewith.' Now, you're a bard, a bard past doubt,

" And no philosopher ; why introduce

" Crotchets like these ? fine, surely, but no use 790

768. turned] 1st edit. gives " tuned," also 1863 edit. 774.
1st edit. reads: Ha, Ha ! of course he might, etc.

¹ Both 1st edition and that of 1863 revised by Browning himself give " tuned "; " turned " does not appear until the 17-vol. edition.

² Bocafoli and Plara are imaginary poets. Browning gives us an imaginary sample of the latter's style. The reading of the 1st edition on line 774 is to be preferred. Browning's alteration, " Gadfly that is," is explanatory of " Breese," which is given in *Johnson's Dictionary* as " a stinging insect, a gad-fly."

" In poetry—which still must be, to strike,
 " Based upon common sense ; there's nothing like
 " Appealing to our nature ! what beside
 " Was your first poetry ? No tricks were tried
 " In that, no hollow thrills, affected throes !
 " ' The man,' said we, ' tells his own joys and woes :
 " ' We'll trust him.' Would you have your songs
 endure ?

Verb.
sap.
 from
 Naddo

" Build on the human heart !—why, to be sure
 " Yours is one sort of heart—but I mean theirs,
 " Ours, every one's, the healthy heart one cares 800
 " To build on ! Central peace, mother of strength,
 " That's father of . . . nay, go yourself that length,
 " Ask those calm-hearted doers what they do
 " When they have got their calm ! And is it true,
 " Fire rankles at the heart of every globe ?
 " Perhaps. But these are matters one may probe
 " Too deeply for poetic purposes :
 " Rather select a theory that . . . yes,
 " Laugh !¹ what does that prove ?—stations you midway
 " And saves some little o'er-refining. Nay, 810
 " That's rank injustice done me ! I restrict
 " The poet ? Don't I hold the poet picked
 " Out of a host of warriors, statesmen . . . did
 " I tell you ? Very like ! As well you hid
 " That sense of power, you have ! True bards believe
 " All able to achieve what they achieve—
 " That is, just nothing—in one point abide
 " Profounder simpletons than all beside.
 " Oh, ay ! The knowledge that you are a bard
 " Must constitute your prime, nay sole, reward ! " ² 820

So prattled Naddo, busiest of the tribe
 Of genius-haunters—how shall I describe
 What grubs or nips or rubs or rips—your louse

Confusion
 worse
 con-
 founded

804. And] Nay. 816. All] Us.

¹ One cannot but feel that a keener sense of humour would have saved Sordello much; had he not been so much in earnest Naddo's refreshing platitudes might have appealed more often than they apparently did.

² Browning gives us here only one side of the arguments. Sordello's interruptions are not given, but only implied. The whole speech is, as it were, a summary, with most of Naddo's usual trite commonplaces omitted.

BOOK II For love, your flea for hate, magnanimous,
 Malignant, Pappacoda, Tagliafer,
 Picking a sustenance from wear and tear
 By implements it sedulous employs
 To undertake, lay down, mete out, o'er-toise
 Sordello? Fifty creepers to elude
 At once! They settled staunchly; shame ensued: 830
 Behold the monarch of mankind succumb
 To the last fool who turned him round his thumb,
 As Naddo styled it! 'Twas not worth oppose
 The matter of a moment, gainsay those
 He aimed at getting rid of; better think
 Their thoughts and speak their speech, secure to slink
 Back expeditiously to his safe place,
 And chew the cud—what he and what his race
 Were really, each of them. Yet even this
 Conformity was partial. He would miss 840
 Some point, brought into contact with them ere
 Assured in what small segment of the sphere
 Of his existence they attended him;
 Whence blunders, falsehoods rectified—a grim
 List—slur it over! How? If dreams were tried,
 His will swayed sicklily from side to side,
 Nor merely neutralized his waking act
 But tended e'en in fancy to distract
 The intermediate will, the choice of means.
 He lost the art of dreaming: Mantuan scenes 850
 Supplied a baron, say, he sang before,
 Handsomely reckless, full to running-o'er
 Of gallantries; "abjure the soul, content
 "With body therefore!" Scarcely had he bent
 Himself in dream thus low, when matter fast
 Cried out, he found, for spirit to contrast
 And task it duly; by advances slight,
 The simple stuff becoming composite,
 Count Lori grew Apollo: best recall
 His fancy! Then would some rough peasant-Paul, 860
 Like those old Ecelin confers with,¹ glance
 His gay apparel o'er; that countenance

The effort
 to be
 simple
 fails

844. rectified] rectify. 851. sang] sung.

¹ Ecelin, the monk, towards the end of his life was accused of the Paulician heresy.

Gathered his shattered fancies into one,
 And, body clean abolished, soul alone
 Sufficed the grey Paulician : by and by,
 To balance the ethereality,
 Passions were needed ; foiled he sank again.

Meanwhile the world rejoiced ('tis time explain)
 Because a sudden sickness set it free
 From Adelaide.¹ Missing the mother-bee, 870

Her mountain-hive Romano swarmed ; at once
 A rustle-forth of daughters and of sons

Death of
 Adelaide

Blackened the valley. " I am sick too, old,
 " Half-crazed I think ; what good's the Kaiser's gold
 " To such an one ? God help me ! for I catch
 " My children's greedy sparkling eyes at watch—
 " ' He bears that double breastplate on,' they say,
 " ' So many minutes less than yesterday ! '

Romano's
 letter to
 Taurello

" Beside, Monk Hilary ² is on his knees .
 " Now, sworn to kneel and pray till God shall please 880
 " Exact a punishment for many things

" You know, and some you never knew ; which brings
 " To memory, Azzo's sister Beatrix

" And Richard's Giglia are my Alberic's
 " And Ecelin's betrothed ³ ; the Count himself
 " Must get my Palma : Ghibellin and Guelf
 " Mean to embrace each other." So began

Romano's missive to his fighting man
 Taurello—on the Tuscan's death, away
 With Friedrich sworn to sail from Naples' bay 890

Next month for Syria. Never thunder-clap
 Out of Vesuvius' throat, like this mishap
 Startled him. " That accursed Vicenza ! I

" Absent, and she selects this time to die !
 " Ho, fellows, for Vicenza ! " Half a score
 Of horses ridden dead, he stood before
 Romano in his reeking spurs : too late—

892. Vesuvius' throat] Vesuvius' mount.

¹ There is a wonderful description of the scene in Bk. iii. 370, where Palma relates what took place to Sordello.

² If this is not meant to be Ecelin in person, we may suppose his repentance was vicarious. The monastery at Oliero contained four monks, of whom Ecelin was one, and two were priests. See *Introd.*, § 17.

³ These alliances are historical.

Book II "Boniface urged me, Este could not wait,"

Taur- The chieftain stammered ; "let me die in peace—
ello's re- "Forget me ! Was it I who craved increase 900
turn "Of rule ? Do you and Friedrich plot your worst
"Against the Father : as you found me first
"So leave me now. Forgive me ! Palma, sure,
"Is at Goito still. Retain that lure—
"Only be pacified ! "

The country rung

With such a piece of news : on every tongue,
How Ecelin's great servant, congeed off,
Had done a long day's service, so, might doff
Comes to The green and yellow,¹ and recover breath
Mantua At Mantua, whither,—since Retrude's death, 910
(The girlish slip of a Sicilian bride
From Otho's house, he carried to reside
At Mantua till the Ferrarese should pile
A structure worthy her imperial style,
The gardens raise, the statues there enshrine,
She never lived to see ²)—although his line
Was ancient in her archives and she took
A pride in him, that city, nor forsook
Her child when he forsook himself and spent
A prowess on Romano surely meant 920
For his own growth—whither he ne'er resorts
If wholly satisfied (to trust reports)
With Ecelin. So, forward in a trice
Were shows to greet him. "Take a friend's advice,"

900. who] e'er. 915. the statues there] their tenantry . . .
919. when] though . . . 921. growth] purposes.

¹ The green and yellow, the Ghibelline colours, were the colours of Romano, from whom they were extended to the whole party. Their origin was in the ribbons or favours given by the ladies to their knights who fought for them in the tournaments, and which afterwards became adopted by the family as their proper colours. Tebaldo Cortelerio asserts, says Verci, that "le fascie dell' arme di Ecelino erano di color giallo e verde : I quali due colore furono propri de' Ghibellini" (vol. i. p. 294).

² Retrude was, as Browning relates, Salinguerra's first wife. Of her connection with the house of Otho I have come across no evidence. Browning has also altered the facts in making her the mother of Sordello, for if we may trust Frizzi's *Storia di Ferrara*, she had five children by Taurello (see Table), all of whom Browning transfers to the second wife, Sophia. See Bk. vi. l. 681.

Quoth Naddo to Sordello, " nor be rash
 " Because your rivals (nothing can abash
 " Some folks) demur that we pronounced you best
 " To sound the great man's welcome ; 'tis a test,
 " Remember ! Strojavacca looks asquint,
 " The rough fat sloven ; and there's plenty hint 930
 " Your pinions have received of late a shock—
 " Outsoar them, cobswan of the silver flock !
 " Sing well ! " A signal wonder, song's no whit
 Facilitated.

BOOK II
 Sordello
 must sing
 as Trou-
 badour

Fast the minutes flit ;
 Another day, Sordello finds, will bring
 The soldier, and he cannot choose but sing ;
 So, a last shift, quits Mantua—slow, alone :
 Out of that aching brain, a very stone,
 Song must be struck. What occupies that front ? 940
 Just how he was more awkward than his wont
 The night before, when Naddo, who had seen
 Taurello on his progress, praised the mien
 For dignity no crosses could affect—
 Such was a joy, and might not he detect
 A satisfaction if established joys
 Were proved imposture ? Poetry annoys
 Its utmost : wherefore fret ? Verses may come
 Or keep away ! And thus he wandered, dumb
 Till evening, when he paused, thoroughly spent,
 On a blind hill-top : down the gorge he went, 950
 Yielding himself up as to an embrace.
 The moon came out ; like features of a face,
 A querulous fraternity of pines,
 Sad blackthorn clumps, leafless and grovelling vines
 Also came out, made gradually up
 The picture ; 'twas Goito's mountain-cup
 And castle. He had dropped through one defile
 He never dared explore, the Chief erewhile
 Had vanished by. Back rushed the dream, enwrapped
 Him wholly. 'Twas Apollo now they lapped,
 Those mountains, not a pettish minstrel meant 960
 To wear his soul away in discontent,
 Brooding on fortune's malice. Heart and brain
 Swelled ; he expanded to himself again,

Goito
 again

BOOK II As some thin seedling spice-tree starved and frail,
 Pushing between cat's head and ibis' tail
 Crusted into the porphyry pavement smooth,
 —Suffered remain just as it sprung, to soothe
 The Soldan's pining daughter, never yet
 Well in her chilly green-glazed minaret,— 97c
 When rooted up, the sunny day she died,
 And flung into the common court beside
 Its parent tree.¹ Come home, Sordello! Soon
 Was he low muttering, beneath the moon,
 Of sorrow saved, of quiet evermore,—
 Since from the purpose, he maintained before,
 Only resulted wailing and hot tears.
 Ah, the slim castle! dwindled of late years,
 But more mysterious; gone to ruin—trails
 Of vine through every loop-hole. Nought avails 98c
 The night as, torch in hand, he must explore
 The maple chamber: did I say, its floor
 Was made of intersecting cedar beams?
 Worn now with gaps so large, there blew cold streams
 Of air quite from the dungeon; lay your ear
 Close and 'tis like, one after one, you hear
 In the blind darkness water drop. The nests
 And nooks retain their long ranged vesture-chests
 Empty and smelling of the iris root
 The Tuscan grated o'er them to recruit 99c
 Her wasted wits. Palma was gone that day,
 Said the remaining women. Last, he lay
 Beside the Carian group reserved and still.

964. some] that.

976. 1st edit. reads—

How from his purposes maintained before.

989. iris-root. Culpeper, on the virtues of this flower, says: "It is under the dominion of the moon. The spicy bitterness of the root of this plant bespeaks it a strengthener of the stomach and head, and therefore may fitly be put into any composition of that intention." He also mentions it as used for "sweet bags and perfumes."

¹ Sordello once more with nature expanded as a seedling would, when pulled up from its cramped position between the stones (where it had been suffered to remain, to please the Sultan's delicate daughter) and flung into the common court beside its parent tree on the day of her death.

The Body, the Machine for Acting Will,
 Had been at the commencement proved unfit ;
 That for Demonstrating, Reflecting it,
 Mankind—no fitter : was the Will Itself
 In fault ?

His forehead pressed the moonlit shelf
 Beside the youngest marble maid awhile ;
 Then, raising it, he thought, with a long smile, 1000
 “ I shall be king again ! ” as he withdrew
 The envied scarf ; into the font he threw
 His crown

Next day, no poet ! “ Wherefore ? ” asked
 Taurello, when the dance of Jongleurs, masked
 As devils, ended ; “ don’t a song come next ? ”
 The master of the pageant looked perplexed
 Till Naddo’s whisper came to his relief.
 “ His Highness knew what poets were : in brief,
 “ Had not the tetchy race prescriptive right
 “ To peevishness, caprice ? or, call it spite, 1010
 “ One must receive their nature in its length
 “ And breadth, expect the weakness with the strength ! ”
 —So phrasing, till, his stock of phrases spent,
 The easy-natured soldier smiled assent,
 Settled his portly person, smoothed his chin,
 And nodded that the bull-bait might begin.

1016. bull-bait] bull-chase.

BOOK III

INTRODUCTION

PART I., ll. 1-593

(1) THE third book is divided into two parts, though Browning made no break in the text, the first portion pursuing the fortunes of Sordello, the second being a long soliloquy by Browning himself in the first person on the proper function of a poet, and bearing only a slight relation to the rest of the work. The scene opens at Goito, whither Sordello has retired after his failure at Mantua. Under the influence of nature Sordello recovers, and begins once more to reflect upon himself and his life's purpose. His attitude is one of blank despair. He is a failure—a failure physically and mentally. The motor force of human action is Will. He has pitted his against that Mantuan world of men and women, resolved that they should obey him, recognize his greatness, grasp his ideals, and respond to his appeal—and he has failed. Instead of lifting them he has lowered himself—sucked in their flattery, hankered after their praise, singing as they wanted and what they wanted, and losing his self-respect, and even the very art of singing itself, in the process. So it is all over at last. He has had his chance and lost it, and with the opportunity has gone those years of youth in which alone the foundations of success can be laid. He sees now the fundamental fallacy involved in his early plan of action.

“ To need become all natures, yet retain
The law of my own nature,”

was an attempt to concentrate and dissipate his powers at one and the same time. The only result has been to take from him the faculty of enjoying the common pleasures of life, while it has brought him no nearer to that glorious synthesis of joy for which he was content to forego the lot of common men. Comparing still

further his own ideal of happiness with that of the world around him, he sees that happiness is largely a question of adjustment between ideals and experience, and is gained in proportion as we are able to assimilate the facts of life with our spiritual aspirations. Thus practical experience is an essential. This is just what he has omitted from his life, owing chiefly to his recognition of his physical shortcomings. The fresh realization of its importance gives him a reason (for which he has in reality been looking) for renewed intercourse with men. His new-found resolve to return to the world is strengthened when he reflects upon the easiness of the victory the world has gained over him. His pride is touched. It is bad enough if at the close of a life of effort death comes, and he must perforce leave it to some other to find what he has missed—but how much worse if his failure be due to his own refusal to work ?

“ To be deposed, immured
clandestinely—still petted, still assured
To govern were fatiguing work—the sight
Fleeting meanwhile ! ’Tis noontide : wreak ere night
Somehow my will upon it, rather ! ”

At this opportune moment Naddo appears with a message from Palma summoning him to Verona. A casual hint from Naddo that her marriage with Boniface is pending clinches his resolve and he sets out at once. The next three hundred lines comprise mainly a long speech by Palma to Sordello in the palace at Verona, in which she discloses her love and gives him the full history of her plan to make him Romano’s head ; at the last moment she conceals from him the story of his birth revealed to her by Adelaide on her deathbed, and hastily breaks into the incidents connected with Ecelin’s retirement into the monastery at Oliero. Then she describes Taurello’s return and his summary of the political situation of which she had now become the keystone, closing with the proposal that they shall forthwith proceed together to Ferrara, explain the position to Taurello, and together assume the leadership of the Kaiser’s party in Italy. “ And Palma’s fled.”

Sordello, left alone, determines to accept the position, to take once more his place among mankind, and wield the power thus put into his hand.

PART II

At this point the story is abruptly broken off, and the rest of the book is a Browning digression, arising mainly from the cessation in the composition of *Sordello* caused by the poet's first visit to Italy, which took place during April and May 1838.

Will *Sordello* ever be finished, he wonders, and see the light as a completed whole, or will it suddenly fade into nothing like the miraculous creation of some eastern magician? No, he says, it shall be finished, but it is well that for a time at least he return to the modern world. Who, then, will provide the necessary inspiration to complete it?

This question of inspiration leads him to utter some reflections on the subject. It is only, he observes, in poets of talent without genius, such as Eglamor, that you find perfection, for perfection implies limitation. Work that is truly inspired always betrays imperfections, an indication of the fact that the poet's life is ever deeper than his work. To the real poet the breath of inspiration is as necessary as the breeze is to the sailor. When it drops he lies becalmed, when it rises he must once more go forwards whither it blows. Thus musing, his eye lights on some peasants busied with their fruit boats. Will one of these, he wonders, provide him the necessary impetus?

But the sight of the peasant girls, so poor and yet so happy, leads him on to a further speculation. He recalls his own youthful ideal on the subject and the changes it has undergone. His first estimate of life was optimistic, and he planned to set before the world a picture of mankind as filled with an ideal happiness. Since then, however, he has discovered that in this life good and evil, happiness and unhappiness, are inextricably mingled, and no life is without both elements. Italy, however, with her wondrous skies and fruitful soil, where the needs of life are at their lowest and where supply and demand are almost equal, brings back with renewed force the conception of his youth that mankind is on the whole happy.

At this point his train of thought is crossed by another.

From Italy his thoughts fly back to England and the grim tragedy of the London streets, and the bitter irony of calling all men happy returns with redoubled force. This side of the question is put before us in the poem in the form of a symbolic figure, the "silent, sad, dishevelled ghost" with whom Browning discourses. The figure represents not merely suffering humanity but sinful man, it includes the vicious and the wicked as well as the poor and the injured, and Browning, in constituting himself their champion, is taking up the cudgels not only on behalf of the suffering, but also of the wickedness, of mankind. The seamy side of life has always attracted him, and his sympathy has ever been with the sinner and the outcast. Yet he is not surprised that his avowal should meet with distrust, for many before him have felt the call, but soon have tired of the ungrateful task. He feels, however, that it is his work and will not shrink therefrom. The defence which he offers is simple: it is that man, however bad, retains always his own conceit of truth, his own code of honour. Tortuous perhaps, but to himself not inaccessible. The sinner's point of view is that he is right and all the rest of the world wrong. He breaks the rules of society because they seem to him unjust, and he does evil that good may come, because in his ignorance he believes that the end justifies the means. This, says Browning, is bad, but at least it is honest. It is infinitely preferable, in his opinion, to the attitude of another class, who, with means and opportunities and education denied to the lower strata of mankind, prostitute them to trivial uses or pander to the lower instincts of their race. It is upon the arm-chair critics, the ideal social reformers, the limp-lambskin poetasters that Browning pours the vials of his wrath. In a passage whose uncouth force recalls the abrupt ruggedness of Carlyle he likens them to men who, from a position of comfort, watch a desert-bound caravan struggling through the parching sand, and who, as they order another iced drink, blandly wonder why those in the desert talk of thirst! And then, he adds, if an honest man does come forward to help, saying what he thinks, awkwardly perhaps, but with sincerity, he is promptly condemned as crude or obscure and his matter banned as unpleasant, as well

as being taxed with presumptuously taking upon himself the office of sole teacher to the universe. The thought of a poetic "office" implying a knowledge of life's ultimate purpose gives Browning the opportunity of an answer to the question, "What do we here?" This life, he says, is but an erecting-shop, where each of us as we pass through the world slowly builds up the complex machine known as human character, tested and modified continually by our work, our companions, and our environment generally. Our knowledge as to its real possibilities and purpose is but guesswork, for as soon as it is finished we die: which means the whole is removed, dismounted wheel by wheel, to be set up anew elsewhere, to begin at last a task indeed, but in a clearer clime

"Than the murk lodgement of our building time."

Mankind, he proceeds, may be divided into three classes, whose office has been

"The worst of us to say we so have seen,
For the better, what it was they saw; the best
Impart the gift of seeing to the rest."

Dealing with the last class, or the poet's, he gives two examples calculated to show their powers of reading character—the one of the youth imprisoned in the Piombi whose thoughts in spite of circumstances still hover with delight around his Zanze, the other a picture of the grim town whose streets yet held the soul of Plara the bard. The function of the poet is to reveal the Truth. It is his power and duty to show man to himself as he is, and not to be deceived by circumstances or appearances. In creative work he must hold the mirror up to nature and not prostitute her sacred gifts to such subject matter as

"Tales of Potiphar's mishap
and sonnets on the earliest ass that spoke!"

When, in the words of Jeremiah, "the prophets prophesy falsely and the priests bear rule by their means and my people love to have it so," there is only one thing left—rebellion.

"Whereas all you, beneath,
Should scowl at, bruise their lips and break their teeth,
Who ply the pullies, for neglecting you."

This actuality and trueness of construction is, says Browning, the virtue of his poem. Sordello is a real Man to be tried and turned, be angry with or pleased at. Whatever reception he may receive, he is at least a genuine creation and not a sham. This brings the argument to a close, and the book ends with an address to his imaginary audience, that they need not fear reprisals from the poet if his poem meets with their disapproval. Æschylus, W. S. Landor, and Miss Haworth are alluded to in the passage which follows, and the book is brought to a conclusion with an anecdote of John the Beloved, to illustrate the line applied to the dénouement of *Sordello*—

“ What seems a fiend perchance may prove a saint.”

BOOK THE THIRD

Sordello, disillusioned and bitterly disappointed, feels the hopelessness, constituted as he is of any effective self-revelment, and resolves to give up the struggle. From this he is roused once more to action (i) by his analysis and self-application of human happiness, which he discerns comes only when our ideals are joined to action and experience (140-180); (ii) by his pride, which is touched by the easiness of his former surrender to the world (210-222); (iii) by a timely summons from Palma to come to Verona. His resolve is clinched by Naddo's careless message about Palma's impending marriage with Count Boniface.

Book III

AND the font took them : let our laurels lie !
 Braid moonfern now with mystic trifoly ¹
 Because once more Goito gets, once more,
 Sordello to itself ! A dream is o'er,
 And the suspended life begins anew ;
 Quiet those throbbing temples, then, subdue
 That cheek's distortion ! Nature's strict embrace,
 Putting aside the past, shall soon efface
 Its print as well—factitious humours grown
 Over the true—loves, hatreds not his own—
 And turn him pure as some forgotten vest
 Woven of painted byssus, silkiest
 Tufting the Tyrrhene whelk's pearl-sheeted lip,
 Left welter where a trireme ² let it slip
 I' the sea, and vexed a satrap ; so the stain
 O' the world forsakes Sordello, with its pain,

Nature's
influence
restores
Sordello

10

¹ In Culpeper's *Herbal* the properties of moonwort or moonfern are thus described: "It is reported that whatever horse casually treads upon this herb will lose its shoes: it is also said to have the virtue of unlocking their fetters and causing them to fall off." Browning here applies it to Sordello in a similar sense; the iron had entered into his soul, but under the soothing influence of nature his fetters fall off and he expands once more. Under trifoly or heart trefoil Culpeper has: "It is under the dominion of the sun, and if it were used it would be found as great a strengthener of the heart and cherisher of the vital spirit as grows."

² A trireme, a Greek ship with three tiers of oars on each side. Browning, by a kind of metonymy, transfers the action from the crew to the ship.

BOOK III Its pleasure : how the tinct loosening escapes,
 Cloud after cloud ¹! Mantua's familiar shapes
 Die, fair and foul die, fading as they flit,
 Men, women, and the pathos and the wit, 20
 Wise speech and foolish, deeds to smile or sigh
 For, good, bad, seemly or ignoble, die.
 The last face glances through the eglantines,
 The last voice murmurs, 'twixt the blossomed vines,
 Of Men, of that machine supplied by thought
 To compass self-perception with, he sought
 By forcing half himself—an insane pulse
 Of a god's blood, on clay it could convulse,
 Never transmute—on human sights and sounds,
 He will To watch the other half with ; irksome bounds 30
 try no It ebbs from to its source, a fountain sealed
 more Forever. Better sure be unrevealed
 Than part revealed : Sordello well or ill
 Is finished : then what further use of Will,
 Point in the prime idea not realized,
 An oversight? inordinately prized,
 No less, and pampered with enough of each
 Delight to prove the whole above its reach.²
 " To need become all natures, yet retain

25. Of men] This May . . . he sought] idly sought.

¹ The picture is the dye coming off the garment as it lies at the bottom of the sea. The famous purple dye was made from the shells of a mollusc at Tyre. Cf. *Popularity*.

" Who has not heard how Tyrian shells
 Enclosed the blue, that dye of dyes
 Whereof one drop worked miracles
 And coloured like Astarte's eyes
 Raw silk the merchant sells ? "

² The keynote to this passage from ll. 23-44 is to be found in the lines 994-998 in Bk. ii. There was no further use of Will. His Will has failed. We may paraphrase these lines as follows:—As the last traces of Mantuan humanity fade from Sordello's mind, that humanity by means of which he was to have stamped his Will upon mankind (had they understood and responded as he in his ignorance of their capacities had imagined they would), he realizes where the fault lay. It is his Will that has failed, and this was a possibility he had never taken into account when he planned his scheme of raising men by self-revelment—it was a point in the prime idea not realized—yes, it was an oversight. Nay more, he had prized that Will inordinately, and he realized now how the little triumphs in individual cases he had gained

" The law of my own nature—to remain 40 Book III
 " Myself, yet yearn . . . as if that chestnut, think,
 " Should yearn for this first larch-bloom crisp and pink,
 " Or those pale fragrant tears where zephyrs stanch
 " March wounds along the fretted pine-tree branch !
 " Will and the means to show will, great and small,
 " Material, spiritual,—abjure them all
 " Save any so distinct, they may be left
 " To amuse, not tempt become ¹! and, thus bereft,
 " Just as I first was fashioned would I be !
 " Nor, moon, is it Apollo now, but me 50
 " Thou visitest to comfort and befriend !
 " Swim thou into my heart, and there an end,
 " Since I possess thee !—nay, thus shut mine eyes
 " And know, quite know, by this heart's fall and rise,²
 " When thou dost bury thee in clouds, and when
 " Out-standest : wherefore practise upon men
 " To make that plainer to myself ? "

Slide here

Over a sweet and solitary year ³

40-41.] my . . . myself] one's . . . oneself. as if] aha,
 42. Should] To . . . 45. to show will] to show it. 46. they
 may] as to be left, amuse. 49. Just as I first] say, just as I
 am . . .

by its means should have taught him how hopeless was the effort to lift mankind in the mass. To need become all natures, etc., was hopeless from the very nature of things.

¹ He will seek no more to reveal himself nor raise mankind, except perhaps by some small effort, such as an occasional song, which can be reckoned rather as an amusement than a temptation to resume the old ideal.

² There is a curious echo here of Keats' last sonnet—

" Bright star, would I were steadfast as thou art

Pillowed upon my fair love's ripening breast,
 To feel for ever its soft fall and swell,
 Awake for ever in a sweet unrest.
 Still, still to hear her tender taken breath
 And so live ever or else swoon to death.

³ Cf. l. 517. The time here must be incorrect. Sordello retired to Goito when Taurello came to Mantua, after hearing of Adelaide's death; Ecelin went into a monastery shortly after the same event, and the rising of the Ferrarese took place within a month, and Sordello is with Palma in the castle at Verona when news of Richard's capture then came.

Book III Wasted ; or simply notice change in him—
 How eyes, once with exploring bright, grew dim 60
 Yet not And satiate with receiving. Some distress
 at ease Was caused, too, by a sort of consciousness
 Under the imbecility,—nought kept
 That down ; he slept, but was aware he slept,
 So, frustrated : as who brainsick made pact
 Erst with the overhanging cataract
 To deafen him, yet still distinguished plain
 His own blood's measured clicking at his brain.
 To finish. One declining Autumn day—
 Few birds about the heaven chill and grey, 70
 No wind that cared trouble the tacit woods—
 He sauntered home complacently, their moods
 According, his and nature's. Every spark
 Of Mantua life was trodden out ; so dark
 The embers, that the Troubadour, who sung
 Hundreds of songs, forgot, its trick his tongue,
 Its craft his brain, how either brought to pass
 Singing at all ; that faculty might class
 With any of Apollo's now. The year
 Began to find its early promise sere 80
 As well. Thus beauty vanishes ; thus stone
 Outlingers flesh : nature's and his youth gone,
 They left the world to you, and wished you joy.
 When, stopping his benevolent employ,¹
 A presage shuddered through the welkin ; harsh
 The earth's remonstrance followed. 'Twas the marsh
 An Gone of a sudden. Mincio, in its place,
 earth- Laughed, a broad water, in next morning's face,
 quake or And, where the mists broke up immense and white
 landslip I' the steady wind, burned like a spilth of light 90
 Out of the crashing of a myriad stars.
 And here was nature, bound by the same bars
 Of fate with him ² ?

61. and] as. 62. was caused] occasioned, too, a . . . 65. so
 frustrated] and frustrate so. 67. still] may. 76-77. his . . .
 his] the . . . the. 78. at all] so e'er. 81. Thus stone, etc.]
 Your stone outlasts your flesh. 90. burned] burnt.

¹ Ironical : referring to the cynicism of the previous line.

² *I.e.* overwhelmed suddenly (as Sordello had been) by forces upon which she had not calculated. But there was a difference : nature could repair such catastrophes ; not so Sordello, who feels

" No ! youth once gone is gone : Book III

" Deeds, let escape, are never to be done.
 " Leaf-fall and grass-spring for the year ; for us—
 " Oh forfeit I unalterably thus
 " My chance ? nor two lives wait me, this to spend,
 " Learning save that ? Nature has time, may mend
 " Mistake, she knows occasion will recur ;
 " Landslip or seabreach, how affects it her 100
 " With her magnificent resources ?—I
 " Must perish once and perish utterly.
 " Not any strollings now at even-close ¹
 " Down the field-path, Sordello ! by thorn-rows
 " Alive with lamp-flies, swimming spots of fire " Might-
 " And dew, outlining the black cypress' spire have-
 " She waits you at, Elys, who heard you first beens "
 " Woo her, the snow-month through, but ere she durst
 " Answer 'twas April. Linden-flower-time-long Idyllic
 " Her eyes were on the ground ; 'tis July, strong 110 love
 " Now ; and because white dust-clouds overwhelm
 " The woodside, here or by the village elm
 " That holds the moon, she meets you, somewhat pale,
 " But letting you lift up her coarse flax veil
 " And whisper (the damp little hand in yours)
 " Of love, heart's love, your heart's love that endures
 " Till death. Tush ! No mad mixing with the rout
 " Of haggard ribalds wandering about
 " The hot torchlit wine-scented island-house
 " Where Friedrich holds his wickedest carouse, 120
 " Parading,—to the gay Palmeritans,
 " Soft Messinese, dusk Saracenic clans
 " Nuocera holds,—those tall grave dazzling Norse, As a
 " High-cheeked, lank-haired, toothed whiter than the courtier
 morse,

98. time, may] leisure. 99. mistake, etc.] occasion, knows
 she, will recur. 108. through] ah, but, etc. 123. Nuocera
 holds] From N. 124. High-cheeked] clear-cheeked.

that chances once lost are gone for ever. This earthquake is
 historical ; most of the chroniclers record it in the year 1222.
 In mense Septembris . . . apparuit in cœlo cometa . . . in
 partibus Italiæ universis terra tremuit, durantis fere per unam
 horam, etc. *Rolandino*, Bk. ii. c. iii.

¹ Sordello pictures to himself how, if things had been other-
 wise, his life might have passed under circumstances now lost for
 ever.

Book III " Queens of the caves of jet stalactites,
 " He sent his barks to fetch through icy seas,
 " The blind night seas without a saving star,
 " And here in snowy birdskin robes they are,
 " Sordello !—here, mollitious alcoves gilt
 " Superb as Byzant domes that devils built ¹ ! 130
 " —Ah, Byzant, there again ! no chance to go
 " Ever like august cheery Dandolo,²
 " Worshipping hearts about him for a wall,
 " Conducted, blind eyes, hundred years and all,
 or " Through vanished Byzant where friends note for him
 Crusader " What pillar, marble massive, sardius slim,
 " 'Twere fittest he transport to Venice' Square—
 " Flattered and promised life to touch them there
 " Soon, by those fervid sons of senators !
 " No more lifes, deaths, loves, hatreds, peaces, wars ! 140
 " Ah, fragments of a whole ordained to be,
 " Points in the life I waited ! what are ye
 " But roundels of a ladder which appeared
 " Awhile the very platform it was reared
 " To lift me on ?—that happiness I find
 " Proofs of my faith in, even in the blind
 " Instinct which bade forego you all unless
 " Ye led me past yourselves. Ay, happiness
 " Awaited me ; the way life should be used

130. that] the. 132. cheery] pleasant. 135. where friends]
 to have noted him. 137. he] we. 139. those] his.

¹ If this is not some obscure allusion, it probably simply reflects the mediæval Italian attitude towards the sectaries of the Greek church. The "odium theologicum" was never displayed with greater mutual bitterness than in the schism of the Greek and Latin churches. See Gibbon, c. lx. One contemporary historian quotes from a sermon of the Greek Patriarch "how he had impressed upon the Greeks for the remission of their sins, to slay the foreigners and drive them from the earth !" which may be paralleled by the speech of Baldwin, who said of the Greeks that "they were not worthy to be called by the name of men but of dogs, to spill whose blood were scarce reckoned as a merit."

² The passage alludes to the fourth crusade (1204-05 A.D.), which was diverted from the Holy Land to Constantinople at the instigation of the Venetians under Henry Dandolo, the Doge. After the sack of the city many of the treasures were transported to Venice, including the famous bronze horses on St Mark's. Henry Dandolo was blind, and of a great age—Gibbon says ninety-seven at his death at Constantinople, in 1205.

" Was to acquire, and deeds like you conducted 150 Book III
 " To teach it by a self-revelment, deemed
 " Life's very use, so long ! Whatever seemed
 " Progress to that, was pleasure ; aught that stayed
 " My reaching it—no pleasure. I have laid
 " The ladder down¹ ; I climb not ; still, aloft
 " The platform stretches ! Bliss strong and soft,
 " I dared not entertain, elude me ; yet
 " Never of what they promised could I get
 " A glimpse till now ! The common sort, the crowd,
 " Exist, perceive ; with Being are endowed, 160
 " However slight, distinct from what they See,
 " However bounded ; Happiness must be,
 " To feed the first by gleanings from the last,
 " Attain its qualities, and slow or fast
 " Become what they behold ; such peace-in-strife,
 " By transmutation, is the Use of Life,
 " The Alien turning Native to the soul
 " Or body—which instructs me ; I am whole
 " There and demand a Palma ; had the world
 " Been from my soul to a like distance hurled,² 170
 " 'Twere Happiness to make it one with me :
 " Whereas, I must, ere I begin to Be,

Sordello's
analysis
of Hap-
piness

152. Life's, etc.] That very use too long. 1st coll. edit. 1863
reads: The very use, so long. 155. ladder] roundels.

¹ Sordello, convinced that his life is spoilt and that nothing remains to live for, yet with a kind of subconscious desire to come out again into the world and make another effort, " he slept but was aware he slept and frustrate so," analyses common happiness and contrasts it with his own view. In his own life he had foregone ordinary pleasures and commonplace experience, resolved only to have that whole which would include all lesser joys. This he perceives is the opposite of the " common sort," who take all they can get from day to day, gradually forming their tastes and becoming what they aim at. This slow moulding of character by the interaction of experience and ideals reveals to Sordello the truth that both elements of imagination and action are necessary ingredients of human happiness, and he realizes that before he begins " to be " in its full sense he must possess an amount of actual worldly knowledge (a world of flesh) equal to his present store of spiritual experience. Hereby giving himself an excellent excuse to mix once more with men.

² He foresees the practical difficulties of a marriage with Palma, which appear far greater than the spiritual union with human aspirations and sorrow—but nevertheless now seen to be necessary for the fulfilment of perfect happiness.

Book III " Include a world, in flesh, I comprehend
 " In spirit now ; and this done, what's to blend
 " With ? Nought is Alien in the world—my Will
 " Owns all already ; yet can turn it—still
 " Less—Native, since my Means to correspond
 " With Will are so unworthy, 'twas my bond
 " To tread the very joys that tantalize
 " Most now, into a grave, never to rise.¹ 180
 " I die then ! Will the rest agree to die ?
 " Next Age or no ? Shall its Sordello try
 " Clue after clue, and catch at last the clue
 Has he " I miss ?—that's underneath my finger too,
 done his " Twice, thrice a day, perhaps,—some yearning traced
 best ? " Deeper, some petty consequence embraced
 No " Closer ! Why fled I Mantua, then ?—complained
 " So much my Will was fettered, yet remained
 " Content within a tether half the range
 " I could assign it ?—able to exchange 190
 " My ignorance (I felt) for knowledge, and
 " Idle because I could thus understand—
 " Could e'en have penetrated to its core
 " Our mortal mystery, yet—fool—forbore,
 " Preferred elaborating in the dark
 " My casual stuff, by any wretched spark
 " Born of my predecessors, though one stroke
 " Of mine had brought the flame forth ! Mantua's yoke,
 " My minstrel's trade, was to behold mankind,—

175. in the world] here. 176. all] it. 180. Most] me.
 194. yet—fool—] and yet forbore. 1st edit. and 1863. 200.
 My own concern] And my own matter. 1868: My own
 concernment.

¹ Sordello, contrasting himself with the common sort, finds this difference. Ordinary people with limited imagination aim only at what is feasible, and reach it, attaining thereby real happiness: the common soldier, for instance, does not aim at being a general, but a sergeant, and, becoming one, attains its qualities, responsibilities, and dignities, and "becomes what he beholds." But Sordello aims at being an Ecelin and a Taurello, and, although he is in imagination capable of all their deeds, if he were suddenly to become so in practice his physical disabilities would make him a failure—he could *not* become what he beholds: it was this very self-knowledge which long ago made him neglect and lay aside and "tread into the grave never to rise" just those very physical qualities the want of which so tantalizes him now that he realizes their true worth!

" My own concern was just to bring my mind
 " Behold, just extricate, for my acquist,
 " Each object suffered stifle in the mist
 " Which hazard, custom, blindness interpose
 " Betwixt things and myself."

200 Book III

Whereat he rose.

The level wind carried above the firs
 Clouds, the irrevocable travellers,
 Onward.

" Pushed thus into a drowsy copse,
 " Arms twine about my neck, each eyelid drops
 " Under a humid finger ; while there fleets,
 " Outside the screen, a pageant time repeats 210
 " Never again ! To be deposed, immured
 " Clandestinely—still petted, still assured
 " To govern were fatiguing work—the Sight
 " Fleeting meanwhile ! 'Tis noontide : wreak ere night
 " Somehow my will upon it, rather ! Slake
 " This thirst somehow, the poorest impress take
 " That serves ! A blasted bud displays you, torn,
 " Faint rudiments of the full flower unborn ;
 " But who divines what glory coats o'erclasp
 " Of the bulb dormant in the mummy's grasp 220
 " Taurello sent ¹ ? "

His
pride is
touched
at last

" Taurello ? Palma sent
 " Your Trouvere," (Naddo interposing leant
 Over the lost bard's shoulder)—" and, believe,
 " You cannot more reluctantly receive
 " Than I pronounce her message : we depart
 " Together. What avail a poet's heart

Naddo's
message

203. Which hazard] contention . . . could impose, in their relation to myself (1863). 204. Whereat] omitted, 1st and 1st coll. edit. 219. glory] petals. 224. receive] conceive.

¹ This is the reverse of his dictum in l. 32—

" . . . Better sure be unrevealed
 Than part revealed."

Who can divine what glory of flower and leaf the coats or layers of the bulb, dormant in the mummy's grasp which Taurello sent home, shut in ? Effort, even though it fail, is better than the greatest potentialities if unused. Sordello is rapidly convincing himself of the need to return to the world and try once more. It only needs the touch to his pride about Palma's wedding which follows to clinch his determination.

Book III " Verona's pomps and gauds ? five blades of grass
 " Suffice him. News ? Why, where your marish¹ was,
 " On its mud-banks smoke rises after smoke
 " I' the valley, like a spout of hell new-broke. 230
 " Oh, the world's tidings ! small your thanks, I guess,
 " For them. The father of our Patroness,
 " Has played Taurello an astounding trick,
 " Parts between Ecelin and Alberic

His news " His wealth and goes into a convent : both
 " Wed Guelfs : the Count and Palma plighted troth
 " A week since at Verona : and they want
 " You doubtless to contrive the marriage-chant
 " Ere Richard storms Ferrara." Then was told
 The tale from the beginning—how, made bold 240
 By Salinguerra's absence, Guelfs had burned
 And pillaged till he unawares returned
 To take revenge² ; how Azzo and his friend
 Were doing their endeavour, how the end
 O' the siege was nigh, and how the Count, released
 From further care, would with his marriage-feast
 Inaugurate a new and better rule,
 Absorbing thus Romano.

" Shall I school

" My master," added Naddo, " and suggest
 " How you may clothe in a poetic vest 250
 " These doings, at Verona ? Your response
 " To Palma ! Wherefore jest ? ' Depart at once ? '
 " A good resolve ! In truth, I hardly hoped
 They " So prompt an acquiescence.³ Have you groped
 leave for " Out wisdom in the wilds here ?—thoughts may be
 Verona " Over-poetical for poetry.

231. small your] little . . . 233. has played] playing . .
 239-251. Whole passage omitted in 1st edit.

¹ Marsh. Cf. Swift, *Rhapsody on Poetry*—

" Or like a bridge that joins a marish
 To moorland of a different parish."

² This, though Naddo of course does not know, was planned by Salinguerra, to get the Guelfs to compromise themselves and give him a reason to break off the engagement between Palma and Boniface, and restore, if possible, the waning fortunes of Romano See Bk. i., Intro., § 5.

³ Sordello's resolve is clinched by Naddo's information, and with characteristic impetuosity he sets out for Verona.

" Pearl-white, you poets liken Palma's neck ¹ ;
 " And yet what spoils an orient like some speck
 " Of genuine white, turning its own white grey ?
 " You take me ? Curse the cicala ² ! "

BOOK III

One more day, 260
 One eve—appears Verona ! Many a group,³
 (You mind) instructed of the osprey's swoop
 On lynx and ounce, was gathering—Christendom
 Sure to receive, whate'er the end was, from
 The evening's purpose cheer or detriment,
 Since Friedrich only waited some event
 Like this, of Ghibellins establishing
 Themselves within Ferrara, ere, as King
 Of Lombardy, he'd glad descend there, wage
 Old warfare with the Pontiff, disengage
 His barons from the burghers, and restore, 270
 The rule of Charlemagne, broken of yore
 By Hildebrand.⁴

The
scene at
Verona

I' the palace, each by each,
 Sordello sat and Palma : little speech
 At first in that dim closet, face with face
 (Despite the tumult in the market-place)
 Exchanging quick low laughs : now would rush
 Word upon word to meet a sudden flush,
 A look left off, a shifting lips' surmise—
 But for the most part their two histories
 Ran best thro' the locked fingers and linked arms
 And so the night flew on with its alarms
 Till in burst one of Palma's retinue ;
 " Now, Lady ! " gasped he. Then arose the two

Sordello
and
Palma

257. poets] minstrels. 264. the end was] it might be. 273.
 I' the palace] That evelong. 277. rush] gush.

¹ Cf. Dante's description of Beatrice (*Vita Nuova*, xix. 66)—

" Color di perla ha quasi informa, quale
 Convienne a donna aver, non fuor misura."

² The tree cricket, whose note annoys Naddo.

³ It is this scene with which the poem opens. Bk. i. 73-197,
 310-348.

⁴ Hildebrand, who was proclaimed Pope in 1073 A.D., was the
 originator of the Papal claim to temporal sovereignty, and the
 Pope under whom the rivalry thus created between Empire and
 Papacy commenced, which in time developed into the Guelf-
 Ghibelline struggle.

Book III And leaned into Verona's air, dead-still.

The A balcony lay black beneath until
 scene in Out, 'mid a gush of torchfire, grey-haired men
 the Came on it and harangued the people : then
 Square Sea-like that people surging to and fro
 Shouted, " Hale forth the carroch—trumpets, ho, 290
 " A flourish ! Run it in the ancient grooves !
 " Back from the bell ! Hammer—that whom behoves
 " May hear the League is up ! Peal—learn who list,
 " Verona means not first of towns breaks tryst
 " To-morrow with the League ! "

Enough. Now turn—
 Over the eastern cypresses : discern !
 Is any beacon set a-glimmer ?

Rang

The air with shouts that overpowered the clang
 Of the incessant carroch, even : " Haste—
 " The candle's at the gateway ! ere it waste, 300
 " Each soldier stand beside it, armed to march
 " With Tiso Sampier ¹ through the eastern arch ! "
 Ferrara's succoured, Palma ² !

Once again

They sat together ; some strange thing in train

292. behoves] behooves. 294. first of towns] be the first.
 297. Is] you.

¹ He met his fate at the hands of Salinguerra according to Browning, but not so in fact.

" for prowess, clove he not
 Tiso, last siege, from crest to crupper ? "

Bk. vi. 615 (see note on).

His wife is mentioned in Bk. v. 275.

² These words I take to be spoken by Sordello, as an inference from the sight of the beacon light, in which case they must represent a prearranged signal of victory from Salinguerra, the victory being the capture of Boniface and the consequent successful issue of the plan arranged by Palma and Taurello for the compromising of the Guelf faction as a means of restoring Ghibelline prestige and affording an excuse for breaking off the engagement between Palma and Boniface. The passages in inverted commas are obviously comments of the crowd outside, which may account for the absence of commas here. In the 1st edit. there are no inverted commas at all. Pietro Gerardo mentions how such means were used as signals, saying that Moncellese, a castle near Padua, "giorno e notte con segni di fumo e di fuoco demandava soccorso."

To say, so difficult was Palma's place
 In taking, with a coy fastidious grace
 Like the bird's flutter ere it fix and feed.
 But when she felt she held her friend indeed
 Safe, she threw back her curls, began implant
 Her lessons ; telling of another want
 Goito's quiet nourished than his own ;
 Palma—to serve him—to be served, alone
 Importing¹ ; Agnes' milk so neutralized
 The blood of Ecelin. Nor be surprised
 If, while Sordello fain had captive led
 Nature, in dream was Palma subjected
 To some out-soul, which dawned not though she pined
 Delaying, till its advent, heart and mind
 Their life. " How dared I let expand the force
 " Within me, till some out-soul, whose resource 320
 " It grew for, should direct it ? Every law
 " Of life, its every fitness, every flaw,
 " Must One determine whose corporeal shape
 " Would be no other than the prime escape
 " And revelation to me of a Will
 " Orb-like o'ershrouded and inscrutable
 " Above, save at the point which, I should know,
 " Shone that myself, my powers, might overflow
 " So far, so much ; as now it signified
 " Which earthly shape it henceforth chose my guide, 330
 " Whose mortal lip selected to declare
 " Its oracles, what fleshly garb would wear
 " —The first of intimations, whom to love ;
 " The next, how love him. Seemed that orb, above
 " The castle-covert and the mountain-close,

Palma's
con-
fession
310

Palma's
ideal

312. to serve him] Palma—to serve—as him —be served.
 315. fain, etc.] nature captive led. 316. insert " wholly."
 318. till its advent] still, (pursued she) heart, etc. 319. Their
 life] to live. 322. every fitness] fitnesses and . . . 323. One]
 that . . . 327. save] except. which] I was to . . . 330. my]
 to. 331. whose mortal] me by, whose. 334. seemed] and.

¹ The desire to rule—to be served—which Goito's quiet had
 nourished in Sordello was not the only want it had aroused, for
 it had brought forth an equal desire to serve on the part of Palma,
 which showed how the womanly influence of her mother contra-
 dicted in Palma's character the masculine traits she had inherited
 from her father.

- Book III "Slow in appearing?—if beneath it rose
 "Cravings, aversions,—did our green precinct
 "Take pride in me, at unawares distinct
 "With this or that endowment,—how, repressed
 "At once, such jetting power shrank to the rest¹! 340
 "Was I to have a chance touch spoil me, leave
 "My spirit thence unfitted to receive
 "The consummating spell?—that spell so near
 "Moreover! ' Waits he not the waking year?
 "' His almond-blossoms must be honey-ripe
 "' By this; to welcome him, fresh runnels stripe
 "' The thawed ravines; because of him, the wind
 "' Walks like a herald. I shall surely find
 "' Him now!'
 "And chief, that earnest April morn
 "Of Richard's Love-court, was it time, so worn 350
 "And white my cheek, so idly my blood beat,
 "Sitting that morn beside the Lady's feet
 "And saying as she prompted; till outburst
 "One face from all the faces. Not then first
 "I knew it; where in maple chamber glooms,
 "Crowned with what sanguine-heart pomegranate
 blooms
 "Advanced it ever? Men's acknowledgment
 "Sanctioned my own: 'twas taken, Palma's bent,—
 "Sordello,—recognized, accepted.
 "Dumb
 "Sat she still scheming.² Ecelin would come 360
 "Gaunt, scared, ' Cesano baffles me,' he'd say:

Realized
in Sor-
dello

336. it rose] arose. 337. did] and. 338. Take] took.
 351. my . . . my] her . . . her. 351. I] she . . . 358.
 my] her. 359. 1840 reads: She said. And day by day the
 Tuscan dumb—sat scheming. 1863 reads: Sordello, accepted.
 And the Tuscan dumb.

¹ Palma's great love-ideal, which she here likens to the moon, was slow in rising above her life's horizon. But so strong was her faith in its ultimate appearance, that if at any time a chance display of her endowments seemed to awake admiration for her in others, or to arouse too distinct likes or dislikes of others in herself, she at once repressed them lest a chance touch should spoil that perfect fruition of her being which the coming of that controlling over-soul must inevitably produce.

² The reading of the 1st edition is preferable, "She," is Adelaide,

" ' Better I fought it out, my father's way !
 " ' Strangle Ferrara in its drowning flats,
 " ' And you and your Taurello yonder !—what's
 " ' Romano's business there ? ' An hour's concern
 " To cure the froward Chief !—induce return
 " As heartened from those overmeaning eyes,
 " Wound up to persevere,—his enterprise
 " Marked out anew, its exigent of wit
 " Apportioned,—she at liberty to sit 370
 " And scheme against the next emergence, I—
 " To covet her Taurello-sprite, made fly
 " Or fold the wing—to con your horoscope
 " For leave command those steely shafts shoot ope,
 " Or straight assuage their blinding eagerness
 " In blank smooth snow.¹ What semblance of success
 " To any of my plans for making you
 " Mine and Romano's ? Break the first wall through,
 " Tread o'er the ruins² of the Chief, supplant
 " His sons beside, still, vainest were the vaunt : 380
 " There, Salinguerra would obstruct me sheer,
 " And the insuperable Tuscan, here,
 " Stay me ! But one wild eve that Lady died
 " In her lone chamber : only I beside :
 " Taurello far at Naples, and my sire
 " At Padua, Ecelin away in ire
 " With Alberic. She held me thus—a clutch
 " To make our spirits as our bodies touch—
 " And so began flinging the past up, heaps
 " Of uncouth treasure from their sunless sleeps 390
 " Within her soul ; deeds rose along with dreams,

Palma's
 dream
 for Sor-
 dello

Adelaide's
 death

366. induce] induced. 367. As] much. 372. her Taurello-
 sprite] What I deemed their sprite. 378. 1840 reads: Romano's
 lord ? That chief—her children too—. 379-380.] omitted.

¹ Palma's character befits her parentage : from her father she
 inherits the love of power and the sense of command, while her
 mother's influence is seen in the longing to caress and be caressed.

" Be a god and hold me
 With a charm !
 Be a man and fold me
 With thine arm ! "

² Now no longer the Ecelin whose mere name was a terror, but
 an obscure monk ; one, as Browning contemptuously puts it
 later, among " the circle of bald-scalps " at Oliero,

- Book III "Fragments of many miserable schemes,
 "Secrets, more secrets, then—no, not the last—
 "'Mongst others, like a casual trick o' the past,
 "How . . . ay, she told me, gathering up her face,
 "All left of it, into one arch-grimace
 "To die with¹ . . .
 "Friend, 'tis gone! but not the fear
 "Of that fell laughing, heard as now I hear.
 "Nor faltered voice, nor seemed her heart grow weak
 "When i' the midst abrupt she ceased to speak 400
 "—Dead, as to serve a purpose, mark!—for in
 "Rushed o' the very instant Ecelin
 "(How summoned, who divines?)—looking as if
 "He understood why Adelaide lay stiff
 "Already in my arms; for 'Girl, how must
 "'I manage Este in the matter thrust
 "'Upon me, how unravel your bad coil?—
 Ecelin's arrival " 'Since' (he declared) ' 'tis on your brow—a soil
 " 'Like hers there!' then in the same breath, 'he
 lacked
 " 'No counsel after all, had signed no pact 410
 " 'With devils, nor was treason here or there,
 " 'Goito or Vicenza, his affair:
 " 'He buried it in Adelaide's deep grave,
 " 'Would begin life afresh, now,—would not slave
 " 'For any Friedrich's nor Taurello's sake!
 " 'What bootéd him to meddle or to make
 " 'In Lombardy?' And afterward I knew
 "The meaning of his promise to undo
 "All she had done—why marriages were made,
 "New friendships entered on, old followers paid 420
 "With curses for their pains,—new friends' amaze
 "At height, when, passing out by Gate Saint Blaise,²

396. All left of it] That face of hers into . . . 399. her heart]
 herself . . . 404. Part understood he why his mate . . . 407.
 your] their . . . 413. He buried] He'd bury . . . 417. And]
 'Twas. 421. new friends] people's . . .

¹ It was the secret of Sordello's birth and parentage she revealed. Palma at the last moment changes her mind and does not tell Sordello. Bk. v. 778 ff.

² There is no gate S. Blaise now existing in Vicenza, nor is one mentioned by Pagliarini in his *Storia di Vicenza*, published in 1663, though a list of gates and churches is given. He does,

" He stopped short in Vicenza, bent his head
 " Over a friar's neck,—' had vowed,' he said,
 " ' Long since, nigh thirty years, because his wife
 " ' And child were saved there, to bestow his life
 " ' On God, his gettings on the Church.' ¹

Book III
 Ecelin
 becomes
 a monk

" Exiled

" Within Goito, still one dream beguiled
 " My days and nights ; 'twas found, the orb I sought
 " To serve, those glimpses came of Fomalhaut,² 430
 " No other : but how serve it ?—authorize
 " You and Romano mingle destinies ?
 " And straight Romano's angel stood beside
 " Me who had else been Boniface's bride,
 " For Salinguerra 'twas, with neck low bent,
 " And voice lightened to music, (as he meant
 " To learn, not teach me,) who withdrew the pall
 " From the dead past and straight revived it all,
 " Making me see how first Romano waxed,
 " Wherefore he waned now, why, if I relaxed 440
 " My grasp (even I !) would drop a thing effete,
 " Frayed by itself, unequal to complete
 " Its course, and counting every step astray
 " Again so much. Romano, every way
 " Stable, a Lombard House now—why start back
 " Into the very outset of its track ³ ?
 " This patching principle which late allied
 " Our House with other Houses—what beside

Taurello's
 arrival
 and
 advice

439. my [her. So throughout speech. 432. You] him. 435. with] the . . . 441. Even I !] think, I ! 445. Lombard] omitted ; start] this starting.

however, mention a church called S. Biasio, which he says lay outside the walls, between the river and the outer ramparts of the city. This cannot be S. Biagio, which is within the walls. Can it be S. Blasio, and was there a gate in the outer ramparts named after it ? It is not like Browning to invent a name like this.

¹ In the expulsion by Este and Boniface : Taurello recalls the scene in Bk. iv. l. 739 ff.

² " A star of the first magnitude in the mouth of the South Fish in the second degree of Pisces of the nature of Venus and Mercury " (Wilson, *Dict. of Astrology*). I can find no clue to its particular use here, or anything regarding its peculiar significance.

³ The policy of making alliances with neighbouring houses, sound enough in the case of the founder of a new house who had everything to gain and nothing to lose thereby, became a danger in the case of an established family, when alliances meant sub-

- BOOK III "Concerned the apparition, the first Knight
 "Who followed Conrad hither in such plight 450
 "His utmost wealth was summed in his one steed ¹ ?
 "For Ecelo, that prowler, was decreed
 "A task, in the beginning hazardous
 "To him as ever task can be to us ;
 Taurello's "But did the weather-beaten thief despair
 story "When first our crystal cincture of warm air
 "That binds the Trevisan,—as its spice-belt
 "(Crusaders say) the tract where Jesus dwelt,—
 "Furtive he pierced, and Este was to face—
 "Despaired Saponian ² strength of Lombard grace ? 460
 "Tried he at making surer aught made sure,
 "Maturing what already was mature ?
 "No ; his heart prompted Ecelo, 'Confront
 "'Este, inspect yourself. What's nature ? Wont.
 The "Discard three-parts your nature, and adopt
 Romano's "The rest as an advantage !' Old strength propped
 policy "The man who first grew Podestà among
 "The Vicentines, no less than, while there sprung
 "His palace up in Padua like a threat,³

449. The first] yon grim . . . 451. Summed in] reckoned.
 461. Tried heat] said he for . . . 467. The earliest of Podestas
 among.

division of property and a weakening of the central power. Taurello's argument is that the policy of the house of Romano is to look higher, to attach themselves to the Kaiser, as Este the Pope, not to pursue a peace-at-any-price policy, which is weakness.

¹ Rolandino, alluding to Ecelino in 1188, says: "*Amicitiam cum Paduanis contraxit et obligavit pignore eis curiam de Honoria, quam olim Eccelis avus ejus habuerat ab antiquis a Rege Corrado cum quo vererat de Alemannia miles ab uno equo.*"

² Professor Sonnenschein, in his notes on *Sordello*, gives Saponian=Samponian Pass, probably Simplon. Dr Berdoe suggests the derivation from Savona, of which Saponian would be the Latin form. The meaning is clear, being a Teutonic contrast to "Lombard"—it is the equivalent of some such word as "Swabian." In the commentary on *Sordello* by K. M. Loudon is this note: "Saponi, a branch of the Ecelin family, settled in Lombardy before Sordello's time," but no authority is given for the statement. In the index to a map of the Empire in Muratori, "Saponaria" is given, but a note is added saying that it is out of the area covered by the map, so we are no wiser.

³ A portion of the old red-brick palace of Ecelino Balbo is still to be seen in Padua, with an inscription putting its date at 1150 A.D.

- " Their noblest spied a grace, unnoticed yet
 " In Conrad's crew. Thus far the object gained,
 " Romano was established—has remained—
 " ' For are you not Italian, truly peers
 " ' With Este ? Azzo better soothes our ears
 " ' Than *Alberic* ? or is this lion's-crine
 " ' From over-mounts ' (this yellow hair of mine)
 " ' So weak a graft on Agnes Este's stock ? '
 " (Thus went he on with something of a mock)
 " ' Wherefore recoil, then, from the very fate
 " ' Conceded you, refuse to imitate 480
 " ' Your model farther ? Este long since left
 " ' Being mere Este : as a blade its heft,
 " ' Este required the Pope to further him :
 " ' And you, the Kaiser—whom your father's whim
 " ' Foregoes or, better, never shall forego
 " ' If Palma dare pursue what Ecelo
 " ' Commenced, but Ecelin desists from : just
 " ' As Adelaide of Susa could intrust
 " ' Her donative,—her Piedmont given the Pope,
 " ' Her Alpine-pass for him to shut or ope 490
 " ' 'Twixt France and Italy,—to the superb
 " ' Matilda's perfecting,¹—so, lest aught curb
 " ' Our Adelaide's great counter-project for
 " ' Giving her Trentine to the Emperor
 " ' With passage here from Germany,—shall you
 " ' Take it,—my slender plodding talent, too ! '
 " —Urged me Taurello with his half-smile.
 " He
 " As Patron of the scattered family
 " Conveyed me to his Mantua, kept in bruit
 " Azzo's alliances and Richard's suit 500
 " Until, the Kaiser excommunicate,
 " ' Nothing remains,' Taurello said, ' but wait
 " ' Some rash procedure : Palma was the link,

473. peers] peer. 474. our] its. 489. her Piedmont]
 that's Piedmont to the Pope. 492. curb.] disturb, " so "
 omitted. 499. me] her.

¹ Matilda, the great Countess of Tuscany, transferred most of her possessions to the Pope in her lifetime. This gift was the foundation of many subsequent Papal claims to lands in Italy. Adelaide of Susa was a contemporary, and governed Piedmont, but no mention is made of her " entrusting her donation " to Matilda.

- Book III " ' As Agnes' child, between us, and they shrink
 Their plot " ' From losing Palma : judge if we advance,
 to en- " ' Your father's method, your inheritance ¹ ! '
 tangle " ' The day I was betrothed to Boniface
 the Guelf " ' At Padua by Taurello's self, took place
 party " ' The outrage of the Ferrarese : again,
 " ' The day I sought Verona with the train 510
 " ' Agreed for,—by Taurello's policy
 " ' Convicting Richard of the fault, since we
 " ' Were present to annul or to confirm,—
 " ' Richard, whose patience had outstayed its term,
 " ' Quitted Verona for the siege.²
 " ' And now
 " ' What glory may engird Sordello's brow
 " ' Through this ? A month since ³ at Oliero slunk
 " ' All that was Ecelin into a monk ;
 " ' But how could Salinguerra so forget
 " ' His liege of thirty years as grudge even yet 520
 " ' One effort to recover him ? He sent
 " ' Forthwith the tidings of this last event
 " ' To Ecelin—declared that he, despite
 " ' The recent folly, recognized his right
 " ' To order Salinguerra : ' Should he wring
 Taurello's " ' Its uttermost advantage out, or fling
 last mes- " ' This chance away ? Or were his sons now Head
 sage to " ' O' the House ? ' Through me Taurello's missive
 Ecelin and sped ;
 " ' My father's answer will by me return.
 " ' Behold ! ' For him,' he writes, ' no more concern 530
 " ' With strife than, for his children, with fresh plots
 The " ' Of Friedrich. Old engagements out he blots
 answer " ' For aye : Taurello shall no more subserve,

507. I] she. So throughout passage. 517. slunk] sunk.
 520. Even] omitted. 522. this last] the Town's . . . 523.
 Ecelin] Oliero. 525. Salinguerra] such proceedings. 527.
 Or were his sons] If not him, who was. 528. Taurello's]
 that . . . 531. fresh] the. 533. Taurello] Him therefore.

¹ *I.e.* Judge if we advance your inheritance by adhering to your father's method.

² This engagement of Palma to Boniface was only a political expedient to gain time, devised by Taurello and acquiesced in by Palma herself. See *Introd.*, Bk. i. § 4.

³ See note on line 58.

" 'Nor Ecelin impose.' Lest this unnerve
 " Taurello at this juncture, slack his grip
 " Of Richard, suffer the occasion slip,—
 " I, in his sons' default (who, mating with
 " Este, forsake Romano as the frith
 " Its mainsea for that firmland, sea makes head
 " Against) I stand, Romano,—in their stead
 " Assume the station they desert, and give
 " Still, as the Kaiser's representative,
 " Taurello licence he demands. Midnight—
 " Morning—by noon to-morrow, making light
 " Of the League's issue, we, in some gay weed
 " Like yours, disguised together, may precede
 " The arbitrators to Ferrara : reach
 " Him, let Taurello's noble accents teach
 " The rest ! Then say if I have misconceived
 " Your destiny, too readily believed
 " The Kaiser's cause your own ! "

540 Palma's
deter-
mination

550

And Palma's fled.

Though no affirmative disturbs the head,
 A dying lamp-flame sinks and rises o'er,
 Like the alighted planet Pollux ¹ wore,
 Until, morn breaking, he resolves to be
 Gate-vein of this heart's blood of Lombardy,
 Soul of this body—to wield this aggregate
 Of souls and bodies, and so conquer fate
 Though he should live—a centre of disgust
 Even—apart, core of the outward crust
 He vivifies, assimilates. For thus
 I bring Sordello to the rapturous
 Exclaim at the crowd's cry, because one round
 Of life was quite accomplished ² ; and he found

560 Sordello
resolves
on action

557. To wield this] have their aggregate.

¹ Castor and Pollux, the twin sons of Jupiter, who were supposed to aid the Romans in battle, are represented as having a star or flame surmounting their helmets by which they were identified.

² Browning leaves us uncertain whether or not at this moment Sordello definitely determined to throw in his lot with the Ghibelline faction, marry Palma, and find his true vocation in the Imperial service. It is, however, distinctly suggested—if it is so it would throw a light on the meaning of his "rapturous exclaim" which would probably refer to line 324: "Ferrara's succoured Palma"—meaning that Sordello's adoption of the

Book III Not only that a soul, whate'er its might,
 Is insufficient to its own delight,
 Both in corporeal organs and in skill
 By means of such to body forth its Will ¹—
 And, after, insufficient to apprise
 Men of that Will, oblige them recognize 570
 The Hid by the Revealed—but that,—the last
 Nor lightest of the struggles overpast,—
 Will, he bade abdicate, which would not void
 The throne, might sit there, suffer he enjoyed
 Mankind, a varied and divine array
 Incapable of homage, the first way,
 Nor fit to render incidentally
 By im- Tribute connived at, taken by the by,
 posing In joys. If thus with warrant to rescind
 his Will The ignominious exile of mankind— 580
 not by Whose proper service, ascertained intact
 revealing As yet, (to be by him themselves made act,
 his soul Not watch Sordello acting each of them)
 Was to secure—if the true diadem
 Seemed imminent while our Sordello drank
 The wisdom of that golden Palma,—thank
 Verona's Lady in her citadel
 Founded by Gaulish Brennus, legends tell :
 And truly when she left him, the sun reared
 A head like the first clamberer's who peered 590
 A-top the Capitol, his face on flame

573. Will, he bade] His will, bade. 575. Mankind] The same . . . 579. with warrant to] thus warranted . . .

Ghibelline cause was to be its salvation. This interpretation, though sounding far-fetched, would be quite in keeping with Sordello's character and self-estimate.

¹ Sordello discovers that a soul cannot realize itself unless it has some instrument such as mankind to carry out its Will; and that it cannot make men see the greatness of that Will except in so far as it reveals itself in action; and thirdly, that his Will which he thought to be a failure is still an existent force. And though mankind are not capable either of appreciating its power by his first method, self-revelment, nor even of rendering fit homage to its self-expression in song, yet he sees that if he adopts Palma's line of action and assumes the leadership of the Ghibelline party, he can enforce his Will upon them in a new way hitherto untried, by making them act out what he conceives. If this course still remains open to him, and thus a chance is still left to him to reveal his greatness, thank Verona's lady, etc., etc.

With triumph, triumphing till Manlius came.¹

Book III

Nor slight too much my rhymes—"that spring, dispread,
 "Dispart, disperse, lingering over head
 "Like an escape of angels²!" Rather say,
 My transcendental platan³! mounting gay
 (An archimage so courts a novice-queen)
 With tremulous silvered trunk, whence branches sheen
 Laugh out, thick-foliaged next, a-shiver soon
 With coloured buds, then glowing like the moon 600
 One mild flame,—last a pause, a burst, and all
 Her ivory limbs are smothered by a fall,
 Bloom-flinders and fruit-sparkles and leaf-dust,
 Ending the weird work prosecuted just
 For her amusement; he decrepit, stark,
 Dozes; her uncontrolled delight may mark
 Apart—⁴

The
Digres-
sion

Yet not so, surely never so
 Only, as good my soul were suffered go
 O'er the lagoon: forth fare thee, put aside—
 Entrance thy synod, as a god may glide 610
 Out of the world he fills, and leave it mute
 For myriad ages as we men compute,
 Returning into it without a break

Will
Sordello
ever be
finished?
Yes

¹ Brennus won the battle of Allia (B.C. 390) against the Romans, and marched on Rome. They scaled the face of the Tarpeian rock (on which the capitol was situated) by night, and nearly surprised the garrison. Manlius, however, awaked by the noise of the sacred geese in the temple of Juno, sprang to arms and gave the alarm, hurling down the foremost climber. On the Piazza Erbe is an ancient statue on a fountain, commonly called the "Madonna Verona." It is said to have been discovered on the site of the old capitol, now occupied by the Castel di S. Pietro. The allusion here seems to mean that Sordello had to thank "the genius of the place" for his inspiration—his true genius seems, however, to have been Palma.

² The lines are quoted from Bk. i. 883, where they describe Sordello's songs.

³ That is, his poem *Sordello*, unfinished as yet. Platan is plane-tree; transcendental may either refer to the psychological nature of the poem or to the fact that much of it is as yet existent only in the poet's imagination.

⁴ Browning compares the unfinished *Sordello* to one of the wonderful creations of the Eastern fakirs, which appear and disappear at the will of the magician. Will *Sordello* disappear or will it become a reality. See Introd., Bk. iii. Part ii.

Book III O' the consciousness ! They sleep, and I awake
O'er the lagune, being at Venice.¹

Note

In just such songs as Eglamor (say) wrote
With heart and soul and strength, for he believed
Himself achieving all to be achieved
By singer—in such songs you find alone
Completeness, judge the song and singer one, 620
And either purpose answered, his in it
Or its in him : while from true works (to wit
Sordello's dream-performances that will
Never be more than dreamed) escapes there still

True
poems
always
imperfect

Some proof, the singer's proper life was 'neath
The life his song exhibits, this a sheath
To that ; a passion and a knowledge far
Transcending these, majestic as they are,
Smouldered ² ; his lay was but an episode
In the bard's life : which evidence you owed 630
To some slight weariness, some looking-off
Or start-away. The childish skit or scoff
In " Charlemagne," (his poem, dreamed divine
In every point except one silly line
About the restiff daughters) ³—what may lurk

615. Being at Venice] omitted : Sordello said once, note. 624.
Never be, ff.] Be never more than dream. 625. life was] fe'sil
beneath. 631. Some looking-off] a looking-off. 634. silly] restive.
635. reads : (Those daughters !) What significance may lurk.

¹ Yes, it shall be finished, but for a time he will leave the
medæival world and return to modern life : he can always go back
again without any fear of loss or incompleteness and finish it.
Browning went on his first journey to Italy when *Sordello* was
half-finished, and the rest of the book records his musings on
the true function of the poet and incidentally on the fate of
Sordello. " They sleep," *i.e.* the characters in *Sordello*, in whose
world he has lived while writing it. " I " is, of course, Browning
himself, who speaks in his own person for the rest of the book.

² The true poet is always greater than his poems : compare
the contemporary description of Chatham's oratory : " That it
impressed every hearer with the conviction that there was some-
thing in him even finer than his words ; that the man was in-
finitely greater than the orator " (*Chatham*, Frederic Harrison,
p. 19).

³ They were the subject of much gossip : it was said Charle-
magne would not let them marry, as he could not bear them to
leave him. The poem is an invention of Browning's, the historical
Sordello never wrote any poem on this subject.

In that ? " My life commenced before this work,"
(So I interpret the significance
Of the bard's start aside and look askance)

Book III

" My life continues after : on I fare
" With no more stopping, possibly, no care
" To note the undercurrent, the why and how,
" Where, when, o' the deeper life, as thus just now,
" But, silent, shall I cease to live ? Alas

The
reason

" For you ! who sigh, ' When shall it come to pass
" ' We read that story ? How will he compress
" ' The future gains, his life's true business,
" ' Into the better lay which—that one flout,
" ' Howe'er inopportune it be, lets out—
" ' Engrosses him already, though professed
" ' To meditate with us eternal rest,

650

" ' And partnership in all his life has found ? ' "
'Tis but a sailor's promise, weather-bound :
" Strike sail, slip cable, here the bark be moored
" For once, the awning stretched, the poles assured !

The poet
like the
sailor

" Noontide above ; except the wave's crisp dash,
" Or buzz of colibri,¹ or tortoise splash,
" The margin's silent : out with every spoil
" Made in our tracking, coil by mighty coil,
" This serpent of a river to his head

" I' the midst ! Admire each treasure, as we spread 660

" The bank, to help us tell our history
" Aright : give ear, endeavour to descry
" The groves of giant rushes, how they grew
" Like demons' endlong tresses we sailed through,
" What mountains yawned, forests to give us vent
" Opened, each doleful side, yet on we went
" Till . . . may that beetle (shake your cap) attest
" The springing of a land-wind from the West ² ! "

637-8] omitted. 641-3 reads—

" To jot down says the bard the why and how
And where and when of life as I do now :
But shall I cease to live for that ! Alas."

646. gains] years. 651-2.] omitted. 653. bark be] galley's
moored. 661. bank] turf. 662. endeavour] then, gentles, and
descry. 666. we] you.

¹ Humming birds.

² No man, says Browning, is ever allowed to reveal himself in
full. Sometimes after long wanderings he seems to cast anchor

Book III —Wherefore? Ah yes, you frolic it to-day!

To-morrow, and, the pageant moved away 670
Down to the poorest tent-pole, we and you
Part company: no other may pursue
Eastward your voyage, be informed what fate
Intends, if triumph or decline await
The tempter of the everlasting steppe.

I muse this on a ruined palace-step
At Venice: why should I break off, nor sit
Longer upon my step, exhaust the fit
England gave birth to? Who's adorable
Enough reclaim a ——¹ no Sordello's Will 680
Alack!—be queen to me? That Bassanese

Who will inspire Sordello's completion? Busied among her smoking fruit-boats? These
Perhaps from our delicious Asolo
Who twinkle, pigeons o'er the portico
Not prettier, bind June lilies into sheaves
To deck the bridge-side chapel, dropping leaves
Soiled by their own loose gold-meal? Ah, beneath
The cool arch stoops she, brownest cheek! Her wreath
Endures a month—a half-month—if I make
A queen of her, continue for her sake 690
Sordello's story? Nay, that Paduan girl
Splashes with barer legs where a live whirl
In the dead black Giudecca² proves sea-weed
Drifting has sucked down three, four, all indeed
Save one pale-red striped, pale-blue turbaned post

676. muse, ruined] sung, empty. 685. June] late.

at last and set to work to unload the treasures he has gained: but the work half done, some apparently trivial circumstance, nevertheless irresistible, sets him off again. Fate drives him on—the tempter of the everlasting steppe—always a mystery. However much man's life may appear an open book, there are always pages sealed no man may read.

It is characteristic of Browning that man's life ever faces eastward (673) towards the rising Sun. Contrast Wordsworth—

“The youth who daily *farther from* the East
Must travel . . .”

¹ A “Browning.” The inspiration which has half completed *Sordello* has given out and he is wondering whence will come the new impetus. The digression up to the close of this passage is a kind of apology or vindication of his cessation of composition.

² The canal della Giudecca, an island off Venice.

For gondolas.

BOOK III

You sad dishevelled ghost ¹That pluck at me and point, are you advised
I breathe? Let stay those girls (e'en her disguised

—Jewels i' the locks that love no crownnet like

Their native field-buds and the green wheat-spike,

So fair!—who left this end of June's turmoil, 700 Mater
dolorosa
appears

Shook off, as might a lily its gold soil,

Pomp, save a foolish gem or two, and free

In dream, came join the peasants o'er the sea).

Look they too happy, too tricked out? Confess

There is such niggard stock of happiness

To share, that, do one's uttermost, dear wretch,

One labours ineffectually to stretch

It o'er you so that mother and children, both

May equitably flaunt the sumpter-cloth ²!Divide the robe yet farther: be content 710

With seeing just a score pre-eminent

Through shreds of it, acknowledged happy wights,

Engrossing what should furnish all, by rights!

For, these in evidence, you clearer claim

A like garb for the rest,—grace all, the same

As these my peasants. I ask youth and strength His ideal
for man

And health for each of you, not more—at length

Grown wise, who asked at home that the whole race

Might add the spirit's to the body's grace,

And all be dizen'd out as chiefs and bards. 720

But in this magic weather one discards

Much old requirement.³ Venice seems a type

704. In dream] omitted: the "kissing" sea inserted. 706.

There is] You have . . . 711. Divide] No: tear the, etc.

112. just a] some few . . . 715-723] omitted.

"At home we dizen scholars, chiefs and kings,

But in this magic weather hardly clings

The old garb gracefully." Inserted.

¹ This is the symbolic figure representing suffering humanity; see Introduction, Bk. iii. Part ii.

² A sumpter is a horse or mule used to carry goods—the sumpter-cloth would be the cloth stretched over the packs so carried: used here as equivalent for happiness, the supply of which is too small for everyone to get a share.

³ Browning's early optimism has been modified, but the richness of Italy recalls his old ideal only to be destroyed by the thought of the misery he has left behind him in England. The reading

- Book III Of Life—'twixt blue and blue extends, a stripe,
 As Life, the somewhat, hangs 'twixt nought and nought :
 'Tis Venice, and 'tis Life—as good you sought
 To spare me the Piazza's slippery stone
 Or keep me to the unchoked canals alone,
 As hinder Life the evil with the good
 Which make up Living, rightly understood. 730
 Only, do finish something! Peasants, queens,
 Take them, made happy by whatever means,
 Parade them for the common credit, vouch
 That a luckless residue, we send to crouch
 His early In corners out of sight, was just as framed
 optimism For happiness, its portion might have claimed
 As well, and so, obtaining joy, had stalked
 Fastuous as any ¹!—such my project, baulked
 Already; I hardly venture to adjust
 The first rags, when you find me.² To mistrust 740
 Me!—nor unreasonably. You, no doubt,
 Have the true knack of tiring suitors out
 With those thin lips on tremble, lashless eyes
 Mater Inveterately tear-shot : there, be wise,
 Dolorosa Mistress of mine, there, there, as if I meant
 com- You insult!—shall your friend (not slave) be shent
 fortified For speaking home? Beside, care-bit erased
 Broken-up beauties ever took my taste

728 ff. reads :

"Or stay me thrid her cross canals alone.
 As hinder life what seems the single good
 Sole purpose, one thing to be understood
 Of life—best be thy Peasants, etc."

737 reads : "And so, could he concede that portion, stalked."

740 reads : "A lappet when I find you."

of the first edition shows more clearly the contrast in the poet's mind between the two countries; how the English definition of the happy ones, the rich and the powerful and the learned, hardly suits Italy, where a more generous climate seems to give at least the working minimum of happiness even to the poorest.

¹ His first idea was to call men happy on the whole, and to explain away the lot of the "luckless residue" on the ground that they were framed for happiness and but for their own fault would have been so.

² So it is with most people. A concrete instance of need will usually break down the best reasoning about the evil of "indiscriminate charity"—sentiment is stronger than reason.

Supremely ; and I love you more, far more
 Than her I looked should foot Life's temple-floor. 750
 Years ago, leagues at distance, when and where
 A whisper came, " Let others seek !—thy care
 " Is found, thy life's provision ; if thy race
 " Should be thy mistress, and into one face,
 " The many faces crowd ? " Ah, had I, judge,
 Or no, your secret ? Rough apparel—grudge
 All ornaments save tag or tassel worn
 To hint we are not thoroughly forlorn—
 Slouch bonnet, unloop mantle, careless go
 Alone (that's saddest, but it must be so) 760
 Through Venice, sing now and now glance aside,
 Aught desultory or undignified,¹—
 Then, ravishingest lady, will you pass
 Or not each formidable group, the mass
 Before the Basilic (that feast gone by,
 God's great day of the Corpus Domini)
 And, wistfully foregoing proper men,
 Come timid up to me for alms² ? And then
 The luxury to hesitate, feign do

He will
 be poet
 of suffer-
 ing man

752. Let others seek] Seek others since . . . 753. thy] a.
 786 reads] "God's day, the great June Corpus Domini."

¹ This can hardly be a personal portrait, remembering the description given of him just at this time by Mrs Bridell-Fox : " He was then slim and dark and very handsome, and—may I hint it—just a trifle of a dandy, addicted to lemon coloured gloves and such things, quite the glass of fashion and the mould of form ! Duff says Browning is describing himself as the Untidy Poet, his style being the garments. A better explanation seems to me to lie in the idea that untidiness here refers rather to a certain freedom from conventions, to his being emphatically an ordinary man, to whom ordinary needs and sufferings appeal, one who can be approached by anybody—just one of the crowd who pass unnoticed. This also lends point to the lines that follow, that suffering humanity approaches him rather than the great ones and makes her appeal. Cf. Matthew Arnold's Sonnet, West London.

" Above her state this spirit soars,
 She will not ask of aliens but of friends,
 Of sharers in a common human fate.
 She turns from that cold succour which attends
 The unknown little from the unknowing great
 And points us to a better time than ours."

² The passage suggests that it is to the poet not to those who most profess to help them, the nobility and the Church, that the masses must look for the real amelioration of their lot

Book III Some unexampled grace !—when, whom but you 770
 Dare I bestow your own upon ? And hear
 Further before you say, it is to sneer
 I call you ravishing ; for I regret
 Little that she, whose early foot was set
 Forth as she'd plant it on a pedestal,
 Now, i' the silent city, seems to fall
 Toward me—no wreath, only a lip's unrest
 To quiet, surcharged eyelids to be pressed
 Dry of their tears upon my bosom. Strange
 Such sad chance should produce in thee such change, 780
 My love ! Warped souls and bodies ! yet God spoke
 Of right-hand, foot and eye—selects our yoke,
 Sordello, as your poetship may find ¹ !
 So, sleep upon my shoulder, child, nor mind
 Their foolish talk ; we'll manage reinstate
 Your old worth ; ask moreover, when they prate
 Of evil men past hope, “ Don't each contrive,
 His de- “ Despite the evil you abuse, to live ?—
 fence of “
 evil. “ Keeping, each losel, through a maze of lies,
 “ His own conceit of truth ? to which he hies 790
 “ By obscure windings, tortuous, if you will,
 “ But to himself not inaccessible ;
 “ He sees truth, and his lies are for the crowd
 “ Who cannot see ; some fancied right allowed
 “ His vilest wrong, empowered the losel clutch
 “ One pleasure from a multitude of such
 “ Denied him.” Then assert, “ All men appear
 “ To think all better than themselves, by here

772. Further] Me out . . . 786. Your old worth] The matter.
 793. truth] it. 795. losel] fellow.

¹ “ To be the poet of suffering humanity, as duty bids him, Browning must sacrifice a good deal of what one expects to find in poetry and consequently a measure of popularity (Duff).” This does not seem to me the meaning so much as that what is passing in the poet's mind is the thought of how much suffering among men is due to their refusal to cut off the offending member : to the fact that sin brings its own punishment and neglect of God's laws produces warped souls and bodies. So in a higher sense the refusal to use great abilities in the service of others (Sordello's fault), to seek the crown and avoid the cross, will likewise brings its own reward. Browning's perception that man's misery is partly due to his own fault only serves to deepen his pity and strengthen their claim upon him for help.

"Trusting a crowd they wrong ; but really," say,
 "All men think all men stupider than they,
 "Since save themselves no other comprehends
 "The complicated scheme to make amends
 "—Evil, the scheme by which, thro' Ignorance,
 "Good labours to exist." A slight advance,—
 Merely to find the sickness you die through,
 And nought beside ! but if one can't eschew
 One's portion in the common lot, at least
 One can avoid an ignorance increased
 Tenfold by dealing out hint after hint
 How nought were like dispensing without stint
 The water of life—so easy to dispense
 Beside, when one has probed the centre whence
 Commotion's born—could tell you of it all ¹ !
 "—Meantime, just meditate my madrigal
 "O' the mugwort that conceals a dewdrop safe !"
 What, dullard ? we and you in smothery chafe,
 Babes, baldheads, stumbled thus far into Zin ²
 The Horrid, getting neither out nor in,
 A hungry sun above us, sands that bung
 Our throats,—each dromedary lolls a tongue,
 Each camel churns a sick and frothy chap,
 And you, 'twixt tales of Potiphar's mishap,
 And sonnets on the earliest ass that spoke,
 —Remark, you wonder any one needs choke
 With founts about ! Potsherd him, Gibeonites ³ !

810

BOOK III

800

 The
 crime of
 sham
 poets

820

819. that bung] among.

¹ See Introduction, Bk. iii. Pt. ii. Browning's point in this passage is that the sin of the ignorant and uneducated, though bad enough, is far less blameworthy than that of those who might help them if they would, but prefer ease and elegance to work. It is the misuse of abilities that angers Browning, and most of all that type of wealthy ignorance which wonders why if the poor have no bread they don't eat cake !

² This passage has the incidents connected with the children of Israel in the wilderness for its background : in its application Browning himself is suggested as the modern Moses trying to draw forth once more the fresh stream of poetic inspiration for the thirsty people ; in language and feeling it suggests Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (see c. ix.), who might almost be associated with Browning as "Moses."

³ Joshua c. ix. "The hewers of wood and drawers of water." The idea is that the masses should stone those false poets who, instead of devoting their powers to the people, spend their time and talents in trumpery minor verse instead of earnest effort.

BOOK III While awkwardly enough your Moses smites
 The rock, though he forego his Promised Land
 Thereby, have Satan claim his carcass,¹ and
 Figure as Metaphysic Poet . . . ah,
 Mark ye the dim first oozings? Meribah! 830
 Then, quaffing at the fount my courage gained,
 Recall—not that I prompt ye—who explained . . .²
 “Presumptuous!” interrupts one. You, not I
 ’Tis brother, marvel at and magnify
 What do Such office: “office,” quotha? can we get
 we here? To the beginning of the office yet?
 What do we here? simply experiment
 Each on the other’s power and its intent
 When elsewhere tasked,—if this of mine were trucked
 For yours to either’s good,—we watch construct, 840
 In short, an engine: with a finished one,
 What it can do, is all,—nought, how ’tis done.
 But this of ours yet in probation, dusk
 A kernel of strange wheelwork through its husk
 Grows into shape by quarters and by halves;
 Remark this tooth’s spring, wonder what that valve’s
 Life an Fall bodes, presume each faculty’s device,
 erecting- Make out each other more or less precise—
 shop The scope of the whole engine’s to be proved;

829. Figure as] Dance, forsooth. 835. such] mine.

¹ Jude v. 9. “Michael the Archangel, when contending with the Devil, he disputed about the body of Moses.”

² The charge of metaphysical subtlety against Browning was frequent, yet he himself describes a Soul’s Tragedy as “a wise metaphysical play” (Letter to Domett). The point of the passage is that his poetry, though condemned as metaphysical, and neglected because obscure in style or subject matter, and in consequence unpalatable to the milk-and-water style of the fashionable poetry of the day—is yet a genuine spring which will prove a real blessing—when that time comes let them remember who it was first struck the rock! Browning was only 26 at this time. Paracelsus had brought him into repute among the few, but he had to get an audience. There is a suggestion both of pique and prophecy in the passage. Meribah was where the children of Israel were supplied by Moses with water from the rock. The word means strife—and the allusion is to the people thirsting for real poetry, and then striving for and against, when the first dim oozings came; Browning soon raised a critical storm as to the value of his poetry.

We die : which means to say, the whole's removed, 850 Book III
 Dismounted wheel by wheel, this complex gin,—
 To be set up anew elsewhere, begin
 A task indeed, but with a clearer clime
 Than the murk lodgment of our building time,
 And then, I grant you, it behoves forget
 How 'tis done—all that must amuse us yet
 So long : and, while you turn upon your heel,
 Pray that I be not busy slitting steel
 Or shredding brass, camped on some virgin shore
 Under a cluster of fresh stars, before 860
 I name a tithe o' the wheels I trust to do !

So occupied, then, are we : hitherto,
 At present, and a weary while to come,
 The office of ourselves,—nor blind nor dumb,
 And seeing somewhat of man's state,—has been,
 For the worst of us, to say they so have seen ;
 For the better, what it was they saw ; the best
 Impart the gift of seeing to the rest :

" So that I glance," says such an one, " around,
 " And there's no face but I can read profound
 " Disclosures in ; this stands for hope, that—fear,
 " And for a speech, a deed in proof, look here ¹ !

Man's
 threefold
 870 power

" ' Stoop, else the strings of blossom, where the nuts
 " ' O'erarch, will blind thee ! Said I not ? She shuts

" ' Both eyes this time, so close the hazels meet !

i. Zanze

" ' Thus, prisoned in the Piombi,² I repeat

" ' Events one rove occasioned, o'er and o'er,

" ' Putting 'twixt me and madness evermore

" ' Thy sweet shape, Zanze ! Therefore stoop ! '

" ' That's truth ! '

859. camped on] upon. 879. Zanze] Elys.

¹ Here follow two pictures illustrative of the poet's art ; the power of seeing men as they are, undeceived by their circumstances or appearance and of conveying that power to others. Thus he sees the happiness that fills the mind of the young man imprisoned in the dungeons constructed on the leads in Venice at the recollection of his Zanze, which no one else would believe ; and likewise discerns the lyric gift of Plara the bard, shut in a grimy ugly, town, despite his appearance, suggestive of anything but a poet.

² Horrible cells on the leads of the Ducal Palace at Venice, where prisoners were roasted in the sun (*Ency. Brit.*).

- Book III " (Adjudge you) ' the incarcerated youth 880
 " ' Would say that ! '
 " Youth ? Plara the bard ? Set down
2. Plara " That Plara spent his youth in a grim town
 the Bard " Whose cramped ill-featured streets huddled about
 " The minster for protection, never out
 " Of its black belfry's shade and its bells' roar.
 " The brighter shone the suburb,—all the more
 " Ugly and absolute that shade's reproof
 " Of any chance escape of joy,—some roof,
 " Taller than they, allowed the rest detect,—
 " Before the sole permitted laugh (suspect 890
 " Who could, 'twas meant for laughter, that ploughed
 cheek's
 " Repulsive gleam !) when the sun stopped both peaks
 " Of the cleft belfry like a fiery wedge,
 " Then sank, a huge flame on its socket edge,
 " With leavings on the grey glass oriel-pane
 " Ghastly some minutes more. No fear of rain—
 " The minster minded that ! in heaps the dust
 " Lay everywhere. This town, the minster's trust,
 " Held Plara ; who, its denizen, bade hail
 " In twice twelve sonnets, Tempe's dewy vale." 900
 " ' Exact the town, the minster and the street ! ' "
 " As all mirth triumphs, sadness means defeat :
 " Lust triumphs and is gay, Love's triumphed o'er
 " And sad : but Lucio's sad. I said before,
 " Love's sad, not Lucio ; one who loves may be
- Happi- " As gay his love has leave to hope, as he
 ness inde- " Downcast that lusts' desire escapes the springe :
 pendent " 'Tis of the mood itself I speak, what tinge
 of circum- " Determines it, else colourless,—or mirth,
 stance " Or melancholy, as from heaven or earth." 910
 " ' Ay, that's the variation's gist ¹ ! ' "
 " Indeed ?

880. Adjudge] applaud. 885. shade and] shadow or. 886 reads: "Brighter the sun illumed the," etc. 900. Tempe's dewy vale] Naddo, Tempe's vale.

¹ Happiness, says Browning, is in reality a question of moral motive not of circumstance. Mirth or melancholy may be due to either a good or evil cause. But the man whose heart is right has happiness, even though outwardly sad and apparently de-

" Thus far advanced in safety then, proceed !
 " And having seen too what I saw, be bold
 " And next encounter what I do behold
 " (That's sure) but bid you take on trust ¹ ! "

Book III

Attack

The use and purpose of such sights ! Alack,
 Not so unwisely does the crowd dispense
 On Salinguerras praise in preference
 To the Sordellos : men of action, these !
 Who, seeing just as little as you please,
 Yet turn that little to account,—engage
 With, do not gaze at,—carry on, a stage,
 The work o' the world, not merely make report
 The work existed ere their day ! In short,
 When at some future no-time a brave band
 Sees, using what it sees, then shake my hand ²
 In heaven, my brother ! Meanwhile where's the hurt
 Of keeping the Makers-see on the alert,
 At whose defection mortals stare aghast
 As though heaven's bounteous windows were slammed
 fast

Thought
and
action
both
needed

920

930

Incontinent ? Whereas all you, beneath,
 Should scowl at, bruise their lips and break their teeth
 Who ply the pullies, for neglecting you ³ :
 And therefore have I moulded, made anew

Sordello :
real not
sham

914. And next] enough. 917. does] hastes. 924. day] time.
 928. Of keeping] To keep. 932. bruise, etc.] curse them, bruise
 lips, break, etc.

feated. Retrospectively the passage shows both how the young man in the Piombi could be happy in his prison and how Plara, shut in the grim town, could write sonnets on Tempe's vale, and looking forward it suggests how Sordello, though outwardly a failure, yet, because his heart was right, triumphs even in death.

¹ That is the dénouement of his Poem *Sordello*.

² The ideal will be reached when the thinkers and the doers combine for the common purpose of the progress of the race, when the sphere of theory and practice are equally recognised and defined and their mutual value perceived.

³ Stern measures are necessary when those who are the chosen leaders and teachers of the people neglect their duties and prostitute their talents, making men think that Heaven itself has deserted them, since those who should be the mouthpiece of Divine guidance are silent. This at least may be claimed for Sordello, that he is a reality not a sham.

Book III A Man, and give him to be turned and tried,
 Be angry with or pleased at. On your side,
 Have ye times, places, actors of your own?
 Try them upon Sordello when full-grown,
 And then—ah then! If Hercules first parched
 His foot in Egypt only to be marched 940
 A sacrifice for Jove with pomp to suit,
 What chance have I? The demigod was mute
 Till, at the altar, where time out of mind
 Such guests became oblations, chaplets twined
 His forehead long enough, and he began
 Slaying the slayers, nor escaped a man.¹
 Take not affront, my gentle audience! whom
 No Hercules shall make his hecatomb,
 Believe, nor from his brows your chaplet rend—
 That's your kind suffrage, yours, my patron-friend, 950
 Whose great verse blares unintermittent on
 Like your own trumpeter at Marathon,—
 You who, Plataea and Salamis being scant,
 Æschylus Put up with Ætna for a stimulant²—
 And did well, I acknowledged, as he loomed
 Over the midland sea last month,³ presumed
 Long, lay demolished in the blazing West
 At eve, while towards him tilting cloudlets pressed
 Like Persian ships at Salamis. Friend, wear
 A crest proud as desert while I declare 960

935. and give him] delivered. 938. when] once. 950. patron
 friend] nay, yours my friend. 952. your own] any. 953 reads:
 "He'll testify who when Plataeas grew scant." 955. did well]
 well too. 957. Long] all day.

¹ Busiris, King of Egypt, was advised by a prophet, Thrasios
 of Cyprus (who became the first victim), to sacrifice a stranger
 every year to ward off bad harvests. Hercules, who was passing
 through the land in search of the apples of the Hesperides,
 allowed himself to be bound, broke loose, and slew the king with
 all his sons and followers (Duff). Browning will not turn
 and rend his audience, no matter what reception his poem meets
 with; he is, on the other hand, grateful for the kind welcome
 received so far. (For the audience see Bk. i. ll. 10-90.)

² In the revised edition the lines 950-4 seem to refer to
 Aeschylus, though the reading in the first edition suggests a
 contemporary, *i.e.* W. S. Landor, which has the support of
 Mrs Orr and the Browning Cyclopædia.

³ The Mediterranean. See Mrs Orr, *Life*, p. 91, for incident
 which probably suggested these lines.

Book III

Landor

Had I a flawless ruby fit to wring
 Tears of its colour from that painted king
 Who lost it, I would, for that smile which went
 To my heart, fling it in the sea, content,
 Wearing your verse in place, an amulet
 Sovereign against all passion, wear and fret ¹ !
 My English Eyebright,² if you are not glad
 That, as I stopped my task awhile, the sad
 Dishevelled form, wherein I put mankind
 To come at times and keep my pact in mind, 970
 Renewed me,—hear no crickets in the hedge,
 Nor let a glowworm spot the river's edge
 At home, and may the summer showers gush
 Without a warning from the missel thrush !
 So, to our business, now—the fate of such
 As find our common nature—overmuch
 Despised because restricted and unfit
 To bear the burthen they impose on it—
 Cling when they would discard it ; craving strength
 To leap from the allotted world, at length 980
 They do leap,—flounder on without a term,
 Each a god's germ, doomed to remain a germ
 In unexpanded infancy, unless . . .
 But that's the story—dull enough, confess !
 There might be fitter subjects to allure ;
 Still, neither misconceive my portraiture
 Nor undervalue its adornments quaint :

Miss
Haworth

962. Tears of its] A tear, its. 963. Who lost] to lose. 966. all passion, wear] low-thoughtedness. 975. So, to our business, now] For Eyebright what I sing's the fate of such . . . 981. They do leap] 'Tis left . . . they. 983-987. " unless to neither "] omitted ; reads: " assure . . . yourself not misconceive," etc.

¹ Walter Savage Landor. Polycrates, King of Samos, warned that his prosperity would make the gods jealous, flung a treasured ruby ring into the sea. It was found seven days after inside a fish. Polycrates afterwards suffered a cruel death. The story is taken from Herodotus, it also is recorded in Wanley's *Wonders of the Little World*, except that it is there called an emerald.

² Letter to Miss Haworth: " You will see Sordello in a trice if the fagging fit holds. . . . I call you ' Eyebright,' meaning a simple and sad sort of translation of ' Euphrasia,' into my own language ; folks would know who Euphrasia or Fanny was —and I should not know Ianthé or Clemanthe."—Mrs Orr, *Life*, p. 91.

Book III What seems a fiend perchance may prove a saint.¹

Ponder a story ancient pens transmit,
Then say if you condemn me or acquit.

990

John the Beloved, banished Antioch

Tale of For Patmos, bade collectively his flock

S. John Farewell, but set apart the closing eve

To comfort those his exile most would grieve,

He knew : a touching spectacle, that house

In motion to receive him ! Xanthus' spouse

You missed, made panther's meat a month since ; but

Xanthus himself (his nephew 'twas, they shut

'Twixt boards and sawed asunder) Polycarp,

Soft Charicle, next year no wheel could warp 1000

To swear by Cæsar's fortune, with the rest

Were ranged ; thro' whom the grey disciple pressed,

Busily blessing right and left, just stopped

To pat one infant's curls, the hangman cropped

Soon after, reached the portal. On its hinge

The door turns and he enters : what quick twinge

Ruins the smiling mouth, those wide eyes fix

Whereon, why like some spectral candlestick's

Branch the disciple's arms ? Dead swooned he, woke

Anon, heaved sigh, made shift to gasp, heart-broke, 1010

" Get thee behind me, Satan ! Have I toiled

" To no more purpose ? Is the gospel foiled

" Here too, and o'er my son's, my Xanthus' hearth,

" Portrayed with sooty garb and features swarth—

" Ah Xanthus, am I to thy roof beguiled

" To see the—the—the Devil domiciled ? "

Whereto sobbed Xanthus, " Father, 'tis yourself

" Installed, a limning which our utmost pelf

" Went to procure against to-morrow's loss ;

" And that's no twy-prong, but a pastoral cross, 1020

" You're painted with ! "

His puckered brows unfold—

And you shall hear Sordello's story told.

¹ This gives us the key to the line Sordello's conclusion may take, of which the story which follows is an illustration.

BOOK IV

INTRODUCTION

THE fourth book opens with a picture of the condition of Ferrara during the truce in the siege, arranged to make terms with Taurello for Count Richard's ransom. Tito, the Imperial Pretor, is there with Count Mainard ; Montelungo, the Papal Legate, with representatives of all the towns in the Lombard league, each with their carroch. We get glimpses of the awful desolation of the city, the gossip of the people, and the lean mercenaries watching with silent interest the arrival of the delegates. Then follows a description of the garden of the San Pietro palace, with its trees and shrubs and statues, built some thirty years ago by Taurello as a home for his bride, Retrude. Within, in the vast dreary presence-chamber, sits Taurello, waiting to receive the various deputations and speculating on the possibility of being able to pacify the league without conceding Richard.

Early that morning Palma and Sordello had arrived from Verona and spent some hours in the camp of Este outside the walls. It was this visit which first opened Sordello's eyes to the real needs of mankind and led to a complete change in his character and opinions, thus precipitating the final crisis and catastrophe. Hitherto Sordello had viewed mankind as a whole ; his ignorance and want of experience had hidden from him the appalling inequalities and consequent injustices which existed throughout society. Now for the first time they are forced upon him in their worst form, through the horrors of war. The more he looked the wider became the chasm between the few and the many, the chiefs and the people. The state and pride of the one, the huge miseries of the other, oppressed him like a nightmare. He began to see at last the immense amount of mere spade work to be done before the ground was even roughly prepared for the fabric he had thought to raise. The perfect symmetry of that purified humanity, like

Shelley's picture of life, "a dome of many-coloured glass," lay shattered at his feet in a million fragments. Before anything else could be done a mighty equilibrium must be somehow established, the many must share the privileges the few had so long possessed. While he thus meditated, ere he could suspect, "mankind and he were really fused." His vocation is found at last, his cause is the "People."

In thus identifying himself with the masses Sordello unconsciously veers round from Ghibelline to Guelf and puts the first stumbling-block in the way of his recently formed determination to accept Palma's offer and assume the headship of the Imperial faction. He begins to speculate upon the practical shape his assistance must take, and the thought crosses his mind that perhaps behind all this horror and misery of war there may lie high motives and wise schemes for the people's good, known only to the real directing minds of the leaders. Buoyed up by the hope this thought suggests, he determines without delay to seek the people's friends—that is, to interview Taurello himself, and probe the causes that lie hidden behind this strange welter of "means" which appear so ghastly in their cruelty and unfairness.

No doubt Taurello will show, thinks Sordello, how all this, sad though it be, is necessary to bring that happiness to the people which Sordello in his simplicity thinks is the underlying motive alike of Emperor and Pope. More than this, may not this fatal rivalry 'twixt Empire and Papacy be based on some mutual misunderstanding? May it not be his lot to clear away such misconception and thus bring peace to men and glory to himself? The interview takes place and Sordello learns the truth—

" Scarce an hour had passed
when forth Sordello came, older by years
than at his entry. Unexampled fears
oppressed him, and he staggered off, blind, mute,
and deaf, like some fresh mutilated brute
into Ferrara ! "

We are not told what Taurello said except by implication from its effect upon Sordello, but it was enough to

open his eyes at last to the true lot of the people and to the utter selfishness and callousness of the great ones of the earth towards those who most needed help and direction. After this fateful interview Sordello spent the rest of the day wandering through Ferrara's streets, deep in thought upon the problem as to how best to start upon his task. As night drew on great fires were lighted in the streets, and mass was said at every carroch. He finds his way to that of Verona, where Palma (in disguise) meets him. Until far into the night they talk, Sordello pleading earnestly with Palma to show him that he is wrong, to prove somehow that good lurks beneath the bad, that in spite of what he said Taurello has the people's good at heart. It is no better when from Ghibelline they turn to Guelf, men weighed with men and deed with deed, Guelf and Ghibelline are proved alike. Neither have a thought beyond themselves, nor a principle—but selfishness and greed. As morning breaks Sordello rises: after all, he thinks, his inactivity, with which he has so bitterly reproached himself, is not the worst. If he has not helped, at least he has not injured. And as he thinks of the bitter mockery of the two great parties, he dimly wonders whether there may not yet be a cause distinct from both of them ordained for him, its true discoverer, through which may be attained at last the people's good.

At this point someone presses forward to suggest a subject for a ballad, and tells in a garrulous, roundabout fashion the story of the Consul Crescentius. During the minority of the Emperor, Otho III., Crescentius had restored in Rome the traditions of Consular government, and from 980 to 988 had expelled the Pope and ruled the city with the title of Consul. Betrayed by the Imperial promise of a safe conduct, he was finally captured by the Emperor after a heroic resistance and put to death. The story fires Sordello's imagination, for he finds in it the germ of that ideal state independent at once of Guelf and Ghibelline, Pope and Emperor, for which he has been seeking. Overleaping, as usual, all difficulties, and ignoring means and methods, he sees himself at last the focus of the world's applause, swaying at his will a new-made empire with Rome as its "established point of light whence rays traversed the world,"

" and thus, in the grey twilight, forth he sprung
To give his thought consistency among
The very People—let their facts avail—
Finish the dream grown from the archers' tale ! "

The middle portion of the book (ll. 375-848) is a long (unspoken) soliloquy by Taurello. All the morning he has been receiving deputations ; first Tito, then Palma and Sordello, then Montelungo. One after the other they had urged their points of view, and now, when the last audience is over, Taurello still sits on—thinking. Browning, throwing himself into Taurello as he sits there gazing into space and idly playing with the baldric received that morning, and which, should he accept it, will make him Imperial vicar in Ecelin's stead, gives us the whole history of his life from childhood up to the present crisis. Incidentally we learn much that throws light upon the poem : the cause of Salinguerra's volcanic hatred of the house of Este is revealed in the story of the kidnapping of Linguetta, Taurello's destined bride ; then we have the picture of the burning and flight from Vicenza consequent upon Salinguerra's alliance with Ecelin and their joint attempt to raise the Vicentines against their liege lord, Azzo. Again, in the supposed burning of Retrude and her infant son we have the apparent reason of Salinguerra's strange self-effacement behind the name of Romano and his steadfast refusal to fight for his own advantage.

Interwoven with this "personalia" runs the real problem which is troubling Taurello—whether or not to accept Frederic's offer and become Imperial vicar. It is characteristic of Browning that he should make the real difficulty a psychological one. Though Taurello puts forward various reasons or excuses why he should not accept the offer, such as loyalty to his old friend Ecelin or the absurdity of one who has the substance of power wanting the shadow of it—"hankering after a boy's preferment," or that he is too old or that it is not worth it—the real reason is altogether different. The one thing which keeps him back and which neutralizes every reason why he should accept it is a conviction that in spite of his power, ability, and obvious qualifications for the post, he is a born servant and not a master, that he is one of those who must be under orders in order

to shine ; given the veriest shadow of a name under which he can work, every faculty he possesses is developed to its fullest, but for independent command he feels instinctively he is unfit. He calls it "Fate," talks of "the land's inevitable Head," puzzles over "the reverences that subject us," acknowledges that Ecelin has not a tithe of his own ability, fails entirely to explain it, but nevertheless accepts it as an inevitable decree outweighing every argument urged by Frederic's Pretor Tito, as well as the more convincing one of his own common sense. How deeply seated this is and how unreasonable is shown in the beginning of his soliloquy, where the mere arrival of Palma in the presence-chamber is sufficient to overthrow completely his new-formed fabric of reasons which had almost determined him to accept the proffered badge out of hand. Browning retains this strange want in Salinguerra to the very end. Though it was commonly supposed that his loss of wife and child was the cause of this atrophy of his initiative, it was not so, for when that loss was once more supplied by his recognition of his son Sordello, his first act was to shelter himself at once behind his son by swearing fealty to him as his overlord.

" He did not embrace
Sordello, but he laid Sordello's hand
on his own eyes, mouth, forehead."

BOOK THE FOURTH

MEANTIME Ferrara lay in rueful case ;
The lady-city, for whose sole embrace
Her pair of suitors struggled, felt their arms
A brawny mischief to the fragile charms
They tugged for—one discovering that to twist
Her tresses twice or thrice about his wrist
Secured a point of vantage—one, how best
He'd parry that by planting in her breast
His elbow spike—each party too intent
For noticing, howe'er the battle went,
The conqueror would have but a corpse to kiss.
“ May Boniface be duly damned for this ! ”

BOOK IV

The
streets of
Ferrara.

—Howled some old Ghibellin, as up he turned,
From the wet heap of rubbish where they burned
His house, a little skull with dazzling teeth :
“ A boon, sweet Christ—let Salinguerra seethe
“ In hell for ever, Christ, and let myself
“ Be there to laugh at him ! ”—moaned some young
 Guelf

Stumbling upon a shrivelled hand nailed fast
To the charred lintel of the doorway, last 20
His father stood within to bid him speed.
The thoroughfares were overrun with weed
—Docks, quitchgrass, loathy mallows no man plants.

The stranger, none of its inhabitants
Crept out of doors to taste fresh air again,
And ask the purpose of a splendid train
Admitted on a morning ; every town
Of the East League was come by envoy down
To treat for Richard's ransom : here you saw
The Vicentine, here snowy oxen draw
The Paduan carroch, its vermillion cross

The League delegates

5. They] each. that] omitted. 9. each party] both parties.
11. The] Its. but] omitted. 15. skull] scull. 22. were] looked.
26. and] or.

Book IV On its white field.¹ A tip-toe o'er the fosse
 Looked Legate Montelungo wistfully
 After the flock of steeples he might spy
 In Este's time, gone (doubts he) long ago
 To mend the ramparts²: sure the laggards know
 The Pope's as good as here! They paced the streets
 More soberly. At last, "Taurello greets
 "The League," announced a pursuivant,— "will match
 "Its courtesy, and labours to dispatch 40
 "At earliest Tito,³ Friedrich's Pretor, sent
 "On pressing matters from his post at Trent,
 "With Mainard Count of Tyrol,—simply waits
 "Their going to receive the delegates."
 "Tito!" Our delegates exchanged a glance,
 And, keeping the main way, admired askance
 The lazy engines of outlandish birth,
 Couched like a king each on its bank of earth—
 Arbalist, manganel and catapult;
 While stationed by, as waiting a result, 50
 Lean silent gangs of mercenaries ceased
 Working to watch the strangers. "This, at least,
 "Were better spared; he scarce presumes gainsay
 "The League's decision! Get our friend away
 "And profit for the future: how else teach
 Monte- "Fools 'tis not safe to stray within claw's reach
 lungo's "Ere Salinguerra's final gasp be blown?
 reflec- "Those mere convulsive scratches find the bone.
 tions

56. Fools] Azzo. story] omitted.

¹ Verci, in his account of the Battle of Carmignano, fought between the Vicentines and Ecelin with the Paduans, mentions the Paduan carroccio drawn by its "otto bianchi buoi," above which floated the standard "una croce vermiglia in campo bianco."

² There is probably a recollection here of the *Parva Chronica Ferrariensis*, whose author relates how sitting over the fire in the winter time he had heard his father tell of thirty-two towers in Ferrara pulled down and destroyed, "viderat in civitate Ferrariæ turres altas xxxii quas mox vidit prosterni et dirui!" Gregoria da Montelungo, the Papal Legate, played an important part in the events of those times. He assisted at the final capture of Salinguerra in Ferrara in 1240, and was made Archbishop of Aquileia. He was a very able and energetic man.

³ Sodegerio de Tito was Podesta of Trent in the Imperialist interest. Verci, vol. iii. p. 138.

"Who bade him bloody the spent osprey's nare ¹? " Book IV

The carrochs halted in the public square. 60

Pennons of every blazon once a-flaunt,
Men prattled, freelier that the crested gaunt
White ostrich with a horse-shoe in her beak ²
Was missing, and whoever chose might speak

"Ecelin" boldly out: so,— "Ecelin

"Needed his wife to swallow half the sin

"And sickens by himself: the devil's whelp,

"He styles his son, dwindles away, no help

"From conserves, your fine triple-curved froth

"Of virgin's blood, your Venice viper-broth—

"Eh? Jubilate!"—"Peace! no little word

"You utter here that's not distinctly heard

"Up at Oliero: he was absent sick

"When we besieged Bassano—who, i' the thick

"O' the work, perceived the progress Azzo made,

"Like Ecelin, through his witch Adelaide?

"She managed it so well that, night by night

"At their bed-foot stood up a soldier-sprite,

"First fresh, pale by-and-by without a wound,

"And, when it came with eyes filmed as in swound, 80

"They knew the place was taken."—"Ominous

"That Ghibellins should get what cautelous

"Old Redbeard ³ sought from Azzo's sire to wrench

"Vainly; Saint George contrived his town a trench

"O' the marshes, an impermeable bar." ⁴

"—Young Ecelin is meant the tutelar

"Of Padua, rather; veins embrace upon

"His hand like Brenta and Bacchiglion."

What now?—"The founts! God's bread, touch not a plank!

Street-
gossip

70

80

71. Peace] Tush.

¹ Literally a nostril, here simply as beak. The word in its Latin form occurs in the Chronicle of Laurentius in the xiii book of his *History of Venice* in describing the conversation between Salinguerra and Ugo da Ramberti, his lieutenant, at the siege of Ferrara in 1240, when Salinguerra was captured. Ugo urged peace, to which Salinguerra replied that if they yielded he would be killed and Ugo mutilated "sed scias, tibi vero *nares* truncabantur."

² The crest of the house of Romano.

³ Frederic the First—"Barba-Rossa."

⁴ The Patron Saint of Ferrara.

Book IV " A crawling hell of carrion—every tank 90
 " Choke-full !—found out just now to Cino's cost ¹—
 " The same who gave Taurello up for lost,
 " And, making no account of fortune's freaks,
 " Refused to budge from Padua then, but sneaks
 " Back now with Concorezzi : 'faith ! they drag
 " Their carroch to San Vitale, plant the flag
 " On his own palace, so adroitly razed
 " He knew it not ; a sort of Guelf folk gazed
 " And laughed apart ; Cino disliked their air—
 " Must pluck up spirit, show he does not care— 100
 Cino's ex- " Seats himself on the tank's edge—will begin
 perience " To hum, *za, za, Cavaler Ecelin*— ²
 " A silence ; he gets warmer, clinks to chime,
 " Now both feet plough the ground, deeper each time,
 " At last, *za, za* and up with a fierce kick
 " Comes his own mother's face caught by the thick
 " Grey hair about his spur ! "

Which means, they lift

The covering, Salinguerra made a shift
 To stretch upon the truth ; as well avoid
 Further disclosures ; leave them thus employed. 110
 Our dropping Autumn morning clears apace,
 And poor Ferrara puts a softened face
 On her misfortunes. Let us scale this tall
 Huge foursquare line of red brick garden-wall ³
 The gar- Bastioned within by trees of every sort
 dens of the San On three sides, slender, spreading, long and short ;
 Pietro Each grew as it contrived, the poplar ramped,
 The fig-tree reared itself,—but stark and cramped,

92. up] side. 113. Let us scale] save one spot.

¹ Cino Boccimpane (i. 146). In the list of leading families at Ferrara in the *Parva Chronica* occurs, "In parochia Sancti Vitalis Buccimpane habenter." The incident itself is imaginative. Note Browning's accuracy. San Vitale was in the south-east corner of Ferrara, next to the San Pietro quarter, where was Taurello's palace.

² This was Ecelin's war-cry. In describing Ecelin's pounce upon Verona in 1227, Rolandino describes how his faction within the city raised the cry "ad arma, ad arma, *za, za, cavaler Ecelin!*"

³ The south-east quarter of Ferrara is built mostly of old red brick, much of which may have come from the old Salinguerra palace.

Made fools of, like tamed lions : whence, on the edge, Book IV
 Running 'twixt trunk and trunk to smooth one ledge 120
 Of shade, were shrubs inserted, warp and woof,
 Which smothered up that variance. Scale the roof
 Of solid tops, and o'er the slope you slide
 Down to a grassy space level and wide,
 Here and there dotted with a tree, but trees
 Of rarer leaf, each foreigner at ease,
 Set by itself : and in the centre spreads,
 Borne upon three uneasy leopards' heads,
 A laver, broad and shallow, one bright spirt
 Of water bubbles in. The walls begirt The
 With trees leave off on either hand ; pursue 130 palace
 Your path along a wondrous avenue gardens
 Those walls abut on, heaped of gleamy stone,
 With aloes leering everywhere, grey-grown
 From many a Moorish summer : how they wind
 Out of the fissures ! likelier to bind
 The building than those rusted cramps which drop
 Already in the eating sunshine. Stop,
 You fleeting shapes above there ! Ah, the pride
 Or else despair of the whole country-side ! 140
 A range of statues, swarming o'er with wasps,
 God, goddess, woman, man, the Greek rough-rasps
 In crumbling Naples marble—meant to look
 Like those Messina marbles Constance ¹ took
 Delight in, or Taurello's self conveyed
 To Mantua for his mistress, Adelaide,—
 A certain font with caryatides
 Since cloistered at Goito ; only, these
 Are up and doing, not abashed, a troop
 Able to right themselves—who see you, stoop 150
 Their arms o' the instant after you ! Unplucked
 By this or that, you pass ; for they conduct
 To terrace raised on terrace, and, between,
 Creatures of brighter mould and braver mien
 Than any yet, the choicest of the Isle ²

119. like tamed lions] omitted. the edge] very edge.
 142. the] your.

¹ Frederic II.'s mother.

² *I.e.* Sicily, where Frederic II.'s court was and where Taurello was married.

Book IV No doubt. Here, left a sullen breathing-while,
 The Up-gathered on himself the Fighter stood
 Statues For his last fight, and, wiping treacherous blood
 Out of the eyelids just held ope beneath
 Those shading fingers in their iron sheath, 160
 Steadied his strengths amid the buzz and stir
 Of the dusk hideous amphitheatre
 At the announcement of his over-match
 To wind the day's diversion up, dispatch
 The pertinacious Gaul : while, limbs one heap,
 The Slave, no breath in her round mouth, watched leap
 Dart after dart forth, as her hero's car
 Clove dizzily the solid of the war
 —Let coil about his knees for pride in him.
 We reach the farthest terrace, and the grim 170
 San Pietro Palace stops us.¹

Such the state

Of Salinguerra's plan to emulate
 Sicilian marvels, that his girlish wife
 Retrude still might lead her ancient life
 In her new home : whereat enlarged so much
 Neighbours upon the novel princely touch
 He took,—who here imprisons Boniface.
 Here must the Envoys come to sue for grace :
 And here, emerging from the laybrinth
 Below, Sordello paused beside the plinth 180
 Of the door-pillar.²

He had really left
 Verona for the cornfields (a poor theft

165. The . . . Gaul] Their . . . friend. 180. Sordello] two
 minstrels. 181. He] One.

¹ The site of Salinguerra's palace was in the south-east corner of the city, on the ground now occupied by four short streets, including the Via Salinguerra and the Via San Pietro. Surrounded by walls and towers, it embraced the churches of S. Pietro, S. Salvatore, and S. Georgio, hence it was called the S. Pietro quarter, or sometimes, as in the *Parva Chronica*, the quarter of S. Salvatore. Ferrara is still surrounded by its old walls, and the Bastione de S. Pietro is still there. East of San Pietro was the San Vitale quarter, where the palace of Cino Boccimpane was situated (ll. 90-100). Beyond S. Vitale is the Bastione di S. Tomaso, probably the "Toma" of Browning (Bk. v. 283).

² According to Palma's arrangement she was with him [see Bk. iii. 565]. This is made clear in the 1st edition reading.

From the morass) where Este's camp was made ¹ ;
 The Envoys' march, the Legate's cavalcade—
 All had been seen by him, but scarce as when,—
 Eager for cause to stand aloof from men
 At every point save the fantastic tie
 Acknowledged in his boyish sophistry,—
 He made account of such. A crowd,—he meant
 To task the whole of it ; each part's intent
 Concerned him therefore : and, the more he pried,
 The less became Sordello satisfied
 With his own figure at the moment. Sought
 He respite from his task ? Descried he aught
 Novel in the anticipated sight
 Of all these livers upon all delight ?
 This phalanx, as of myriad points combined,
 Whereby he still had imaged the mankind
 His youth was passed in dreams of rivalling,
 His age—in plans to prove at least such thing
 Had been so dreamed,—which now he must impress
 With his own will, effect a happiness
 By theirs,—supply a body to his soul
 Thence, and become eventually whole
 With them as he had hoped to be without ²—
 Made these the mankind he once raved about ?
 Because a few of them were notable,
 Should all be figured worthy note ? As well
 Expect to find Taurello's triple line
 Of trees a single and prodigious pine.
 Real pines rose here and there ; but, close among,
 Thrust into and mixed up with pines, a throng
 Of shrubs, he saw,—a nameless common sort

Book IV

Sordello's
reflec-
tions on
the
crowd

190

200

210

The
appeal
of the
crowd

185. All . . . him] Looked cursorily o'er. 198. the] that.
 200. prove : such] show : the. 201. he must] hastened to.
 206. once raved] was mad.

¹ They had spent the earlier hours outside the walls in Este's camp.

² This is the point where the change from egotist to altruist begins to work in Sordello. He feels for the first time the mute appeal made by human misery. The crowd which hitherto, since they had refused to accept him on his own valuation, he had hoped to be without, which he had up to this regarded as a clog not worthy of his genius, he now feels to look to him for help. The miseries he has witnessed that morning arouse his humanity.

Book IV O'erpast in dreams, left out of the report
 And hurried into corners, or at best
 Admitted to be fancied like the rest.
 Reckon that morning's proper chiefs—how few !
 And yet the people grew, the people grew,
 Grew ever, as if the many there indeed,
 More left behind and most who should succeed,— 220
 Simply in virtue of their mouths and eyes,
 Petty enjoyments and huge miseries,—
 Mingled with, and made veritably great
 Those chiefs : he overlooked not Mainard's state
 Nor Concorezzi's station,¹ but instead
 Of stopping there, each dwindled to be head
 Of infinite and absent Tyrolese
 Or Paduans ; startling all the more, that these
 Seemed passive and disposed of, uncared for,
 Yet doubtless on the whole (like Eglamor) 230
 Smiling ; for if a wealthy man decays
 And out of store of robes must wear, all days,
 One tattered suit, alike in sun and shade,
 'Tis commonly some tarnished gay brocade
 Fit for a feast-night's flourish and no more :
 Nor otherwise poor Misery from her store
 Of looks is fain upgather, keep unfurled
 For common wear as she goes through the world,
 The faint remainder of some worn-out smile
 Meant for a feast-night's service merely.² While 240
 Crowd upon crowd rose on Sordello thus,—
 (Crowds no way interfering to discuss,
 Much less dispute, life's joys with one employed
 In envying them,—or, if they aught enjoyed,
 Where lingered something indefinable
 In every look and tone, the mirth as well
 As woe, that fixed at once his estimate
 Of the result, their good or bad estate)—

Their
 patience

215. and] fast. 219. if the] with. 221. mouths and] faces.
 224. he overlooked not] no overlooking. 230. like] quoth.
 232. robes] such. 234. gay] fine. 245. Where] There.

¹ Maurisio mentions "Ubertus de Conconezo," a citizen of Milan, as Podesta in Vicenza with Alberico da Romano.

² What struck Sordello was not so much the misery of the people as their almost cheerful acquiescence in their lot. They were dumb : numbed by suffering and ill-treatment.

Old memories returned with new effect :
 And the new body, ere he could suspect,
 Cohered, mankind and he were really fused,
 The new self seemed impatient to be used
 By him, but utterly another way
 Than that anticipated ¹: strange to say,
 They were too much below him, more in thrall
 Than he, the adjunct than the principal.
 What bootéd scattered units ?—here a mind
 And there, which might repay his own to find,
 And stamp, and use ?—a few, howe'er august,
 If all the rest were grovelling in the dust ?
 No : first a mighty equilibrium, sure,
 Should he establish, privilege procure
 For all, the few had long possessed ! He felt
 An error, an exceeding error melt ²:
 While he was occupied with Mantuan chants,
 Behoved him think of men, and take their wants,
 Such as he now distinguished every side,
 As his own want which might be satisfied,—
 And, after that, think of rare qualities
 Of his own soul demanding exercise.
 It followed naturally, through no claim
 On their part, which made virtue of the aim
 At serving them, on his,—that, past retrieve,
 He felt now in their toils, theirs—nor could leave
 Wonder how, in the eagerness to rule,
 Impress his will on mankind, he (the fool !)
 Had never even entertained the thought
 That this his last arrangement might be fraught

250

The idea
 of Service
 dawns

270

249. returned] flocked, but. 257. units] brilliances.
 258 reads—

“The mind—of any number he might hope to bind
 And stamp with his own thought, howe'er august.”

263. For all, the few] For them himself. 269. think of rare]
 of wondrous. 272. It . . . naturally] and like demand it longer
 —though no claim. 276. mankind] them. 277. even] omitted:
 “obvious” before thought.

¹ He was to serve, they to command.

² He realized now that it was service that was needed ; hitherto
 the people had been regarded mainly as a foil to show off his
 greatness and incidentally be bettered in the process ; now his
 needs are to be theirs.

- Book IV With incidental good to them as well,
 And that mankind's delight would help to swell 280
 His own. So, if he sighed, as formerly
 Because the merry time of life must fleet,
 'Twas deeper now,—for could the crowds repeat
 Their poor experiences? His hand that shook
 The Legate Was twice to be deplored. "The Legate, look!
 "With eyes, like fresh-blown thrush-eggs on a thread,
 "Faint-blue and loosely floating in his head,
 "Large tongue, moist open mouth; and this long while
 "That owner of the idiotic smile
 "Serves them!"
- He fortunately saw in time 290
 His fault however, and since the office prime
 Includes the secondary—best accept
 Both offices¹; Taurello, its adept,
 Could teach him the preparatory one,
 And how to do what he had fancied done
 Long previously, ere take the greater task
 How render first these people happy? Ask
 The people's friends²: for there must be one good
 One way to it—the Cause! He understood
 The meaning now of Palma; why the jar 300

279-80 reads—

"With good to them as well: and he should be
 Rejoiced thereat: and if, as formerly He sighed," etc., etc.
 300. Why the jar—else] Else why are—the great ado.

¹ Sordello has not yet put aside altogether the search for personal joy as the main end of life; it is still "the office prime" with him. But he has grasped the thought that the way to attain it must be through the secondary office of serving the people. In their happiness he will find his own. He is thus in a half-way position between the pure selfishness which ignored others except when they served as a foil to heighten his own brilliance, or as a means of momentary gratification by admiring and applauding him, and that complete unselfishness which, asking no reward, lays down its very life for others.

² Sordello's naïveté and utter ignorance of human nature is nowhere better portrayed than here. With delicious simplicity he imputes without hesitation the purest motives of philanthropy alike to Kaiser and Pope, to Azzo and Taurello. He goes off hot foot to Taurello to get his advice on serving mankind, convinced in his own mind that the cause of all this struggle is "the best way of making the people happy." Poor Sordello!

BOOK IV

Else, the ado, the trouble wide and far
 Of Guelfs and Ghibellins, the Lombard hope
 And Rome's despair?—'twixt Emperor and Pope
 The confused shifting sort of Eden tale—
 Hardihood still recurring, still to fail—
 That foreign interloping fiend, this free
 And native overbrooding deity :

Yet a dire fascination o'er the palms
 The Kaiser ruined, troubling even the calms
 Of paradise ; or, on the other hand,
 The Pontiff, as the Kaisers understand,
 One snake-like cursed of God to love the ground,
 Whose heavy length breaks in the noon profound
 Some saving tree—which needs the Kaiser, dressed
 As the dislodging angel of that pest :

Pope and
 Kaiser—
 alike un-
 selfish !
 310

Yet flames that pest bedropped, flat head, full fold,
 With coruscating dower of dyes. " Behold
 " The secret, so to speak, and master-spring
 " O' the contest !—which of the two Powers shall bring
 " Men good, perchance the most good : ay, it may 320
 " Be that !—the question, which best knows the way." ¹

And hereupon Count Mainard strutted past
 Out of San Pietro ; never seemed the last
 Of archers, slingers : and our friend began
 To recollect strange modes of serving man—
 Arbalist, catapult, brake, manganel,
 And more. " This way of theirs may,—who can tell ?—
 " Need perfecting," said he : " let all be solved
 " At once ! Taurello 'tis, the task devolved
 " On late : confront Taurello ! "

Their
 methods
 strange

And at last
 He did confront him. Scarce an hour had past
 When forth Sordello came, older by years
 Than at his entry. Unexampled fears
 Oppressed him, and he staggered off, blind, mute
 And deaf, like some fresh-mutilated brute,
 Into Ferrara—not the empty town
 That morning witnessed : he went up and down

330

The dis-
 illusion-
 ment

303 Rome's] or its. 309. Even the] thorough. 313. Whose
 heavy length] with lulling eye. 314. which needs] who but . .
 316. Yet flames] Then ? Yet. 323. looked] seemed.

¹ Thus Sordello thinks in his ignorance.

Book IV Streets whence the veil had been stript shred by shred,
 So that, in place of huddling with their dead
 Indoors, to answer Salinguerra's ends, 340
 Townsfolk make shift to crawl forth, sit like friends
 With any one. A woman gave him choice
 Of her two daughters, the infantile voice
 Or the dimpled knee, for half a chain, his throat
 Was clasped with ; but an archer knew the coat—
 Its blue cross and eight lilies,—bade beware
 One dogging him in concert with the pair
 Though thrumming on the sleeve that hid his knife.¹
 Night set in early, autumn dews were rife.
 They kindled great fires while the Leaguers' mass 350
 Began at every carroch : he must pass
 Between the kneeling people. Presently
 The carroch of Verona caught his eye
 With purple trappings ; silently he bent
 Over its fire, when voices violent
 Began, " Affirm not whom the youth was like
 " That struck me from the porch : I did not strike
 " Again : I too have chestnut hair ² ; my kin

349. were] fell. 350. They kindled great fires] and fires
 were kindled. 357. struck me] striking.

¹ The archer who recognized Sordello's minstrel's coat embroidered with the arms of Romano warned the bravo not to touch him. These details of the arms of Romano, Browning drew from Verci in his description of the sculptured coat of arms of Ecelin in his palace in Padua. On his helmet was depicted a cross which was the sign of the Crusader (it was of different colours according to the Crusader's nationality. The Italian Cross was blue, the English gold, the German black, and so on). On one half of the shield was painted eight lilies. The lily, which later became a distinguishing sign of the Guelf party, was at an earlier stage used by both parties indiscriminately, possibly as a sign of devotion to the Blessed Virgin, to whom Ecelin has already dedicated a church at Bassano (see note, Bk. iv. l. 610). His words are, " Nella parte davanti apparisce una picciola croce . . . nell' una meta del scudo si veggono dipinti otto gigli " (Vol. i. p. 273). Browning is incorrect in putting the cross on to the coat of Sordello. He would wear the arms of Ecelin the Monk, who was not entitled to a cross at all, not having been a crusader. The arms to which Verci refers were those of Ecelin the Stammerer. The cross was put on the helmet.

² " And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child, and the children shall rise up against their parents."

"Hate Azzo and stand up for Ecelin. Book IV
 "Here, minstrel, drive bad thoughts away! Sing! 360
 Take 360
 "My glove for guerdon!" And for that man's sake He meets
 He turned: "A song of Eglamor's!"—scarce named, Palma
 When, "Our Sordello's rather!"—all exclaimed;
 "Is not Sordello famousest for rhyme?"
 He had been happy to deny, this time,—
 Profess as heretofore the aching head
 And failing heart,—suspect that in his stead
 Some true Apollo had the charge of them,
 Was champion to reward or to condemn,
 So his intolerable risk might shift 370
 Or share itself; but Naddo's precious gift
 Of gifts, he owned, be certain¹! At the close—
 "I made that," said he to a youth who rose
 As if to hear: 'twas Palma through the band
 Conducted him in silence by her hand.
 Back now for Salinguerra. Tito of Trent
 Gave place to Palma and her friend, who went
 In turn at Montelungo's visit: one
 After the other were they come and gone,—
 These spokesmen for the Kaiser and the Pope, 380
 This incarnation of the People's hope,
 Sordello,—all the say of each was said;
 And Salinguerra sat,—himself instead
 Of these to talk with, lingered musing yet.
 'Twas a drear vast presence-chamber roughly set Taurello
 In order for the morning's use; full face, in the
 The Kaiser's ominous sign-mark had first place, presence
 The crowned grim twy-necked eagle, coarsely-blackd chamber
 With ochre on the naked wall; nor lacked
 Romano's green and yellow either side²; 390

372. he owned] returned. 375. her] the. 377. to Palma and
 her friend] remember to the pair. 380-384.] omitted. 386.
 full face] you met. 387.] omitted. 388. crowned] black. 390.
 Romanos] There . . . tokens.

¹ The Verona carroch was, of course, Guelf, hence his danger;
 but Naddo's "gift of gifts," common-sense, saved him, and he
 did not betray himself.

² The colours of Romano are alluded to in Bk. ii. l. 909, in
 describing the alleged dismissal of Taurello, who now "might
 doff the green and yellow." This is drawn from Verci

BOOK IV But the new token Tito brought had tried
 The Legate's patience—nay, if Palma knew
 What Salinguerra almost meant to do
 Until the sight of her restored his lip
 A certain half-smile, three months' chieftainship
 Had banished ¹! Afterward, the Legate found
 No change in him, nor asked what badge he wound
 And unwound carelessly. Now sat the Chief
 Silent as when our couple left, whose brief
 Encounter wrought so opportune effect 400
 In thoughts he summoned not, nor would reject,²
 Though time 'twas now if ever, to pause—fix
 On any sort of ending: wiles and tricks
 Exhausted, judge! his charge, the crazy town,
 Just managed to be hindered crashing down—
 His last sound troops ranged—care observed to post
 His best of the maimed soldiers innermost—
 So much was plain enough, but somehow struck
 Him not before. And now with this strange luck
 Of Tito's news, rewarding his address 410
 So well, what thought he of?—how the success
 His With Friedrich's rescript there, would either hush
 thoughts Old Ecelin's scruples, bring the manly flush
 To his young son's white cheek, or, last, exempt
 Himself from telling what there was to tempt ³?

391. token] symbol. 407. best] last.

¹ In Taurello's long soliloquy, which occupies the main portion of the rest of the book, the real question which is worrying him is whether or not he shall accept the position offered to him by Tito, on behalf of the Emperor, of Vicar-General, and thereby assume in place of Ecelin the leadership of the Imperial party in N. Italy. At first he almost accepted it out of hand, when the opportune appearance of Palma put him in his place again. After that he cannot persuade himself to take it, though what alternative course to take he cannot see. His arguments against his innate conviction that he is born to serve, not rule, are worked out with great skill and subtlety. Finally he puts the whole question on one side, to deal with the solution of the immediate question whether he can pacify the league without conceding Richard.

² They had unconsciously stopped his acceptance of the baldric for himself. In this case "the *man* who hesitates is lost."

³ After Tito's splendid offer one might naturally have expected that Taurello would be vaguely calculating the effect of his acceptance on those mainly concerned by it; how it

No : that this minstrel was Romano's last
 Servant—himself the first ! Could he contrast
 The whole !—that minstrel's thirty years just spent
 In doing nought, their notablest event
 This morning's journey hither, as I told— 420
 Who yet was lean, outworn and really old,
 A stammering awkward man that scarce dared arise
 His eye before the magisterial gaze—
 And Salinguerra with his fears and hopes
 Of sixty years, his Emperors and Popes,
 Cares and contrivances, yet, you would say,
 'Twas a youth nonchalantly looked away
 Through the embrasure northward o'er the sick
 Expostulating trees—so agile, quick
 And graceful turned the head on the broad chest 430
 Encased in pliant steel, his constant vest,
 Whence split the sun off in a spray of fire
 Across the room ; and, loosened of its tire
 Of steel, that head let breathe the comely brown
 Large massive locks discoloured as if a crown
 Encircled them, so frayed the basnet where
 A sharp white line divided clean the hair ;
 Glossy above, glossy below, it swept
 Curling and fine about a brow thus kept
 Calm, laid coat upon coat, marble and sound : 440
 This was the mystic mark the Tuscan found,
 Mused of, turned over books about. Square-faced,
 No lion more ; two vivid eyes, enchased
 In hollows filled with many a shade and streak
 Settling from the bold nose and bearded cheek.
 Nor might the half-smile reach them that deformed
 A lip supremely perfect else—unwarmed,
 Unwidened, less or more ; indifferent

His ap-
pearance

418. years just] autumns. 420. I] we. 422. man] youth.
 423. the] that. 434. breathe] see.

would either hush old Ecelin's scruples about coming out into the world again, to see his subordinate put over his head ; or fill his son at last with a desire to take his proper place ; or, lastly, how it would save him having to make any awkward explanations either to Ecelin or anyone else. But, as a matter of fact, it only drove home the truth he had always known, though never consciously admitted, that he was not a leader but a servant : that long years of service had atrophied his sense of initiative, so that now the chance came he could not take it.

Book IV Whether on trees or men his thoughts were bent,
 Thoughts rarely, after all, in trim and train 450
 As now : a period was fulfilled again :
 Of such, a series made his life, compressed
 In each, one story serving for the rest—
 How his life-streams rolling arrived at last
 At the barrier, whence, were it once overpast,
 They would emerge, a river to the end,—
 Gathered themselves up, paused, bade fate befriend,
 Took the leap, hung a minute at the height,
 Then fell back to oblivion infinite :
 Therefore he smiled. Beyond stretched garden-grounds
 Where late the adversary, breaking bounds, 461
 Had gained him an occasion, That above,
 That eagle, testified he could improve
 Effectually. The Kaiser's symbol lay
 Beside his rescript, a new badge by way
 Of baldric ; while,—another thing that marred
 Alike emprise, achievement and reward,—
 Ecelin's missive was conspicuous too.
 The family of Salin- guerra What past life did those flying thoughts pursue ?
 As his, few names in Mantua half so old ; 470
 But at Ferrara, where his sires enrolled
 It latterly, the Adelardi spared
 No pains to rival them : both factions shared
 Ferrara, so that, counted out, 'twould yield
 A product very like the city's shield,
 Half black and white, or Ghibellin and Guelf
 As after Salinguerra styled himself
 And Este who, till Marchesalla died,
 (Last of the Adelardi)—never tried
 His fortune there : with Marchesalla's child ¹ 480
 Would pass,—could Blacks and Whites be reconciled

454-459] omitted. 462. had gained] procured. 473. No pains] Few means. 480-481. With . . . would pass] but . . . transmits.

¹ Browning has retained the historical facts while altering the names. Marchesalla was the daughter, not the father, whose right name was Guglielm. Linguetta was the name of Guglielm's only niece, his sister's child. Este kidnapped Marchesalla from the house of Torello Salinguerra, Taurello's father, to whom she had been entrusted (she was seven years old) at her father's death, with a view to marrying her to Taurello when old enough. The story is told in the *Chronica Parva Ferrariensis*. See Intro., § 11.

And young Taurello wed Linguetta,—wealth
 And sway to a sole grasp. Each treats by stealth
 Already : when the Guelfs, the Ravennese
 Arrive, assault the Pietro quarter, seize
 Linguetta, and are gone ! Men's first dismay
 Abated somewhat, hurries down, to lay
 The after indignation, Boniface,
 This Richard's father.¹ " Learn the full disgrace
 " Averted, ere you blame us Guelfs, who rate
 " Your Salinguerra, your sole potentate
 " That might have been, 'mongst Este's valvassors—
 " Ay, Azzo's—who, not privy to, abhors
 " Our step ; but we were zealous." Azzo then
 To do with ! Straight a meeting of old men :
 " Old Salinguerra dead, his heir a boy,
 " What if we change our ruler and decoy
 " The Lombard Eagle of the azure sphere ²
 " With Italy to build in, fix him here,
 " Settle the city's troubles in a trice ?
 " For private wrong, let public good suffice ! "

In fine, young Salinguerra's staunchest friends
 Talked of the townsmen making him amends,
 Gave him a goshawk, and affirmed there was
 Rare sport, one morning, over the green grass
 A mile or so. He sauntered through the plain,
 Was restless, fell to thinking, turned again
 In time for Azzo's entry with the bride ;
 Count Boniface rode smirking at their side ;
 " She brings him half Ferrara," whispers flew,

The
 cause of
 his hate
 of Este

490

500

510

486. Men's] our. 489. This Richard's father] no meaner
 spokesman. 490. Guelfs] wont to. 496-497] omitted. 505.
 green grass] morass.

¹ Ludovico S. Bonifacio died after Ponte Alto in 1212. See
Vita Ricciardi Bonifacii, Muratori, Tome viii. After mentioning
 the death of Azzo, the father of Aldobrandinus, the chronicler
 adds: In the same year " Ludovicus S. Bonifacius moritur, vir
 per ea tempore virtute et potentia insignes."

² In the 1st edition the lines 495-500 read—

" The Lombard eagle of the azure sphere
 With Italy to build in, builds he here ?
 This deemed—the other owned upon advice—
 A third reflected on the matter twice—
 In fine. . . .

The Eagle was the crest of the house of Este."

BOOK IV "And all Ancona! If the stripling knew!"

Anon the stripling was in Sicily¹
Where Heinrich ruled in right of Constance; he
Was gracious nor his guest incapable;
Each understood the other. So it fell,

His marriage and re-
turn to Mantua
Had near forgotten by what precise degrees
He crept at first to such a downy seat,
The Count trudged over in a special heat
To bid him of God's love dislodge from each

520

Of Salinguerra's palaces,—a breach
Might yawn else, not so readily to shut,
For who was just arrived at Mantua but
The youngster, sword on thigh and tuft on chin,
With tokens for Celano, Ecelin,
Pistore, and the like²! Next news,—no whit
Do any of Ferrara's domes befit

His wife of Heinrich's very blood: a band
Of foreigners assemble, understand
Garden-constructing, level and surround,
Build up and bury in. A last news crowned
The consternation: since his infant's birth,
He only waits they end his wondrous girth
Of trees that link San Pietro with Tomà,
To visit Mantua.³ When the Podestà
Ecelin, at Vicenza, called his friend
Taurello thither, what could be their end
But to restore the Ghibellins' late Head

530

518. at first] by into. 535. Mantua] Us. When as its . . .

¹ After recording Este's marriage, Pigna says: Salinguerra, piqued by Este's attitude, went to Sicily to Caesar in 1198. "Salinguerra vedutosi fatto pari a gli altri cittadini e nol potendo supportare: si transferi l'anno mille cento novantaotto in Sicilia a Cesare. A cui esposa il nuovo principio di grandezza che si era presentato a Principi di Este."

² The counts of Celano were nobles near Ferrara (see note on l. 637). Pistore was the Bishop of Vicenza, who was expelled with Taurello and Ecelin in 1194. Maurisio says he was found drowned in the castle moat at Sclodus pierced with an arrow the day after the flight.

³ This should be Ferrara, for the San Pietro palace was at Ferrara, and he has already come to Mantua (see l. 523). The 1st edition reading puts it right. For "Toma" see note on l. 171, and Bk. v. 283.

The Kaiser helping? He with most to dread
 From vengeance and reprisal, Azzo, there
 With Boniface beforehand, as aware
 Of plots in progress, gave alarm, expelled
 Both plotters¹: but the Guelfs in triumph yelled
 Too hastily. The burning and the flight,
 And how Taurello, occupied that night
 With Ecelin, lost wife and son, I told:

—Not how he bore the blow, retained his hold,
 Got friends safe through, left enemies the worst
 O' the fray, and hardly seemed to care at first:
 But afterward men heard not constantly
 Of Salinguerra's House so sure to be!

Though Azzo simply gained by the event
 A shifting of his plagues—the first, content
 To fall behind the second and estrange
 So far his nature, suffer such a change
 That in Romano sought he wife and child,
 And for Romano's sake seemed reconciled
 To losing individual life, which shrunk
 As the other prospered—mortised in his trunk;
 Like a dwarf palm which wanton Arabs foil
 Of bearing its own proper wine and oil,
 By grafting into it the stranger-vine,
 Which sucks its heart out, sly and serpentine,
 Till forth one vine-palm feathers to the root,
 And red drops moisten the insipid fruit.²

553. The first] This one . . . 554. The second] the other.
 555. reads. "You will not say, his nature, but so change . . ."
 558. which shrunk] deep sunk. 559. As . . . prospered] a very
 pollard.

¹ In the 1st edition the lines from 536 read—

"Regaled him at Vicenza, Este, there
 With Boniface beforehand, each aware
 Of plots in progress, gave alarm, expelled
 A party which abetted him, but yelled
 Too hastily."

² The simile is compressed in the first edition—

"A very pollard . . .
 Which Arabs out of wantonness contrive
 Shall dwindle that the alien stock may thrive
 Till forth that vine-palm feathers to the root
 And red drops moisten them its arid fruit."

"Mortised" used in the sense of "graft." Lit. to cut a hole to
 receive a tenon. See Bk. v. 225, note.

Book IV

540 The ex-
 pulsion
 from
 Vicenza
 and alli-
 ance with
 Romano

550

560

Book IV Once Adelaide set on,—the subtle mate
 Taurello Of the weak soldier, urged to emulate
 and Adel- The Church's valiant women deed for deed,
 aide And paragon her namesake,¹ win the meed
 O' the great Matilda,—soon they overbore 570
 The rest of Lombardy,—not as before
 By an instinctive truculence, but patched
 The Kaiser's strategy until it matched
 The Pontiff's, sought old ends by novel means.
 "Only, why is it Salinguerra screens
 "Himself behind Romano?—him we bade
 "Enjoy our shine i' the front, not seek the shade!"
 —Asked Heinrich, somewhat of the tardiest
 To comprehend. Nor Philip² acquiesced
 At once in the arrangement; reasoned, plied 580
 His friend with offers of another bride,
 A statelier function—fruitlessly: 'twas plain
 Taurello through some weakness must remain
 Obscure. And Otho, free to judge of both
 —Ecelin the unready, harsh and loth,
 And this more plausible and facile wight
 With every point a-sparkle—chose the right,
 Admiring how his predecessors harped
 On the wrong man: "thus," quoth he, "wits are
 warped
 "By outsides!" Carelessly, meanwhile, his life 590
 Suffered its many turns of peace and strife
 His ac- In many lands—you hardly could surprise
 complish- The man; who shamed Sordello (recognize!)
 ments In this as much beside, that, unconcerned
 and in- What qualities were natural or earned,
 fluence With no ideal of graces, as they came
 He took them, singularly well the same—

567. Of the weak soldier] and wholly at his beck.
 575-578 reads—

"Only Romano Salinguerra screens—
 Heinrich was somewhat," etc.

590. meanwhil]e withal.

¹ Adelaide of Susa (see iii. 493), where she is said to have entrusted to Matilda her scheme for giving Piedmont to the Pope.

² The Emperor who disputed the Empire with Otho on the death of Heinrich.

Speaking the Greek's own language, just because
 Your Greek eludes you, leave the least of flaws
 In contracts with him ; while, since Arab lore 600
 Holds the stars' secret—take one trouble more
 And master it ! 'Tis done, and now deter
 Who may the Tuscan, once Jove trined for her,
 From Friedrich's path !—Friedrich, whose pilgrimage
 The same man puts aside, whom he'll engage
 To leave next year John Brienne in the lurch,¹
 Come to Bassano, see Saint Francis' church
 And judge of Guido the Bolognian's piece,²
 Which,—lend Taurello credit,—rivals Greece—
 Angels, with aureoles like golden quoits 610
 Pitched home, applauding Ecelin's exploits.
 For elegance, he strung the angelot,
 Made rhymes thereto ; for prowess, clove he not
 Tiso, last siege, from crest to crupper³ ? Why

598. The Greek's own] a dozen languages . . . 600 reads :
 "In contracts, while through Arab lore, deter—who may," etc.
 601-2] omitted. 612. For elegance] In Painimrie.

¹ That is, Taurello's influence induced Frederick to drop the Crusade. See Bk. i. l. 194.

² There is a most ancient tradition, says Verci, that Ecelin the Stammerer built the Church of S. Francis at Bassano as the result of a vow made to the Blessed Virgin during his return from the Holy Land when the ship was in danger of going down. The church was decorated with frescoes recording Ecelin's deeds in the Holy Land, and contained a magnificent painted tomb in the choir with a portrait of Ecelin kneeling before the Blessed Virgin. An inscription was appended which read : "Anno Domini MCLXXVII., Guidus Bononiensis pingebat" (Verci, Vol. i. p. 111). S. Francis' is still the parish church at Bassano. Built of red brick, it dates from 1180 A.D. Nothing remains of any frescoes or tombs. As elsewhere in Lombardy, the public feeling against the Ecelini after 1260 probably caused the destruction of every sign of their hated domination. Bassano passed under the rule of Vicenza in 1261.

³ Tisolino da Campo Sampiero (Tiso Sampier) was one of Azzo's dearest friends. In the first siege of Ferrara (not mentioned in the poem), when Salinguerra nearly trapped Azzo as he subsequently trapped Count Richard, Tiso got separated in the retreat and was found killed. The story is in Rolandino, Bk. ii. 2. He refused to surrender to the common soldiery, and as no one of noble blood could be found he was slain. Everyone regretted him. Salinguerra says Rolandino "*tristatus lacrymabiliter et fecit eum honorabiliter sepeliri.*" Browning's account is imaginative.

Book IV Detail you thus a varied mastery
 But to show how Taurello, on the watch
 Contrast For men, to read their hearts and thereby catch
 in char- Their capabilities and purposes,
 acter with Sordello Displayed himself so far as displayed these :
 Sordello While our Sordello only cared to know 620
 About men as a means whereby he'd show
 Himself, and men had much or little worth
 According as they kept in or drew forth
 That self ; the other's choicest instruments
 Surmised him shallow.¹

Meantime, malcontents
 Dropped off, town after town grew wiser. "How
 "Change the world's face?" asked people; "as 'tis
 now

"It has been, will be ever : very fine
 "Subjecting things profane to things divine,
 His "In talk ! This contumacy will fatigue 630
 success "The vigilance of Este and the League !
 "The Ghibellins gain on us !"—as it happened
 Old Azzo and old Boniface, entrapped
 By Ponte Alto, both in one month's space
 Slept at Verona² : either left a brace
 Of sons—but, three years after, either's pair
 Lost Guglielm and Aldobrand its heir³ :
 Azzo remained and Richard—all the stay
 Of Este and Saint Boniface, at bay

632. reads : "Observe ! accordingly, their basement sapped."

¹ While Sordello's object was self-display, Taurello showed as little of his own hand as possible—only what was necessary to see his opponent's cards.

² Browning is not quite correct here. Azzo and Boniface died within eight days of each other, and within a month of their defeat by Ecelin at Ponte Alto in 1212 A.D., but not, as is suggested, as the result of the battle. "Illis temporibus et diebus," says Maurisio, "*naturali* morte nota ultra mensem post haec (*i.e.* Ponte Alto) tam Marchio quam Comes interiit, infra octo dies unus post alterum."

³ Azzo of Este left Aldobrand and Azzo VII. The former, it was said, died of poison administered by the Conte di Celano, who had been bribed by the opposite faction (Giraldus, *Comment. di Ferrara*). Richard left an elder son, the Richard of *Sordello*, and Guglielm, a younger son. Browning is wrong in calling Guglielm the heir (*Chron. Monach. Paduani*, Liber i.).

As 'twere. Then, either Ecelin grew old
 Or his brain altered—not o'er the proper mould
 For new appliances—his old palm-stock
 Endured no influx of strange strengths. He'd rock
 As in a drunkenness, or chuckle low
 As proud of the completeness of his woe,
 Then weep real tears ;—now make some mad onslaught
 On Este, heedless of the lesson taught
 So painfully,—now cringe for peace, sue peace
 At price of past gain, bar of fresh increase
 To the fortunes of Romano. Up at last
 Rose Este, down Romano sank as fast. 650
 And men remarked these freaks of peace and war
 Happened while Salinguerra was afar :
 Whence every friend besought him, all in vain,
 To use his old adherent's wits again.
 Not he !—" who had advisers in his sons,
 " Could plot himself, nor needed any one's
 " Advice." 'Twas Adelaide's remaining staunch
 Prevented his destruction root and branch
 Forthwith ; but when she died, doom fell, for gay 660
 He made alliances, gave lands away
 To whom it pleased accept them, and withdrew
 For ever from the world. Taurello, who
 Was summoned to the convent, then refused
 A word at the wicket, patience thus abused,
 Promptly threw off alike his imbecile
 Ally's yoke, and his own frank, foolish smile.
 Soon a few movements of the happier sort
 Changed matters, put himself in men's report
 As heretofore ; he had to fight, beside,
 And that became him ever. So, in pride
 And flushing of this kind of second youth,
 He dealt a good-will blow.¹ Este in truth

In Taur-
 ello's ab-
 sence
 Romano
 wanes

His re-
 turn
 changed
 matters

648-50—" Now cringe, sue peace, but peace.
 At price of all advantage : therefore cease.
 The fortunes of Romano."

652. these freaks] this sort . . . 653. Happened] commenced.
 660. but when she died] Goito green above her, gay.

665-8. A word] " however patient, thus abused.
 At Este's mercy through his imbecile
 Ally, was fain dismiss the foolish smile."

¹ That is, the capture of Count Richard.

Book IV Lay prone—and men remembered, somewhat late,
 A laughing old outrageous stifled hate
 He bore to Este—how it would outbreak
 At times spite of disguise, like an earthquake
 In sunny weather—as that noted day
 When with his hundred friends he tried to slay
 Azzo before the Kaiser's face : and how, 680
 On Azzo's calm refusal to allow
 A liegeman's challenge, straight he too was calmed¹ ;
 As if his hate could bear to lie embalmed,
 Bricked up, the moody Pharaoh, and survive
 All intermediate crumbings, to arrive
 At earth's catastrophe—'twas Este's crash
 Not Azzo's he demanded,² so, no rash
 Procedure ! Este's true antagonist
 Rose out of Ecelin : all voices whist,
 All eyes were sharpened, wits predicted. He 690
 'Twas, leaned in the embrasure absently,
 Amused with his own efforts, now, to trace
 With his steel-sheathed forefinger Friedrich's face
 I' the dust : but as the trees waved sere, his smile
 Deepened, and words expressed its thoughts erewhile.
 He re- " Ay, fairly housed at last, my old compeer ?
 calls the " That we should stick together, all the year
 expulsion " I kept Vicenza³ !—How old Boniface,
 " Old Azzo caught us in its market-place,

679. he tried to] he offered. 685. to arrive] be alive. 690. All
 eyes] Each glance. 691. absently] presently. 698. Vicenza]
 Verona.

¹ This scene, which is recorded by Maurisio, and quoted by
 Sismondi, Verci, and others, took place before Otho the Emperor.
 Salinguerra accused Azzo of treachery, which Azzo denied.
 Salinguerra's challenge to battle he haughtily refused, saying
 that " plures habebat fideles et nobiliores ipso Salinguerra, qui
 pro ipso pugnaret cum eodem, si vellet pugnare." Matters went
 so far that the German nobles drew their swords and interposed
 between them.

² His hatred was against the whole house, not merely against
 the individual.

³ Both the 1st edition and that of 1863 read " Verona."
 Vicenza is, however, obviously meant, as it refers to the expul-
 sion of 1194. In the Piazza dei Signori at Vicenza are two old
 columns, to which Browning probably refers. If so, he is
 historically incorrect, as they date from the period of the Venetian
 domination, that is, from 1404.

" He by that pillar, I at this,—caught each
 " In mid swing, more than fury of his speech,
 " Egging the rabble on to disavow
 " Allegiance to their Marquis—Bacchus, how
 " They boasted ! Ecelin must turn their drudge,
 " Nor, if released, will Salinguerra grudge
 " Paying arrears of tribute due long since—
 " Bacchus ! My man could promise then, nor wince :
 " The bones-and-muscles ! Sound of wind and limb,
 " Spoke he the set excuse I framed for him :
 " And now he sits me, slaving and mute, 710
 " Intent on chafing each starved purple foot
 " Benumbed past aching with the altar slab :
 " Will no vein throb there when some monk shall blab
 " Spitefully to the circle of bald scalps,
 " ' Friedrich's affirmed to be our side the Alps '
 " Eh, brother Lactance, brother Anaclet ?
 " Sworn to abjure the world, its fume and fret,
 " God's own now ? Drop the dormitory bar,
 " Enfold the scanty grey serge scapular
 " Twice o'er the cowl to muffle memories out ? 720
 " So ! But the midnight whisper turns a shout,
 " Eyes wink, mouths open, pulses circulate
 " In the stone walls : the past, the world you hate
 " Is with you, ambush, open field—or see
 " The surging flame—we fire Vicenza—glee !
 " Follow, let Pilio and Bernardo chafe !
 " Bring up the Mantuans—through San Biagio ¹—safe !
 " Ah, the mad people waken ? Ah, they writhe
 " And reach us ? If they block the gate ? No tithe
 " Can pass—keep back, you Bassanese ! The edge, 730
 " Use the edge—shear, thrust, hew, melt down the
 wedge,
 " Let out the black of those black upturned eyes !
 " Hell—are they sprinkling fire too ? The blood fries
 " And hisses on your brass gloves as they tear

The cowl
 makes
 not the
 monk

704. They boasted] They caught us. 717. its fume and] and
 the world's . . .

¹ The old Church of S. Biagio (now a school) still stands close
 to the Porta di Pusterla. The Ecelini palace was close by where
 now is the Church of S. Corona, built as a thankoffering for the
 extinction of the family in 1260 A.D

BOOK IV "Those upturned faces choking with despair.

"Brave! Slidder through the reeking gate¹! 'How now?

"'You six had charge of her?' And then the vow²

"Comes, and the foam spirits, hair's plucked, till one shriek

"(I hear it) and you fling—you cannot speak—

"Your gold-flowered basnet to a man who haled 740

"The Adelaide he dared scarce view unveiled

"This morn, naked across the fire: how crown

"The archer that exhausted lays you down

"Your infant, smiling at the flame, and dies³?

"While one, while mine . . .

"Bacchus! I think there lies

"More than one corpse there" (and he paced the room)

"—Another cinder somewhere⁴: 'twas my doom

"Beside, my doom! If Adelaide is dead,

"I live the same, this Azzo lives instead

749. I live the same] I am the same.

¹ The historical facts of this expulsion from Vicenza were as follows:—The city was divided into two factions, the Maltraversi, under the leadership of Count Ugucione, and the Vivaresi, under that of Ecelin. In June 1194 they fell out over the election of a Podesta, and compromised by leaving the choice in the hands of two electors, one nominated by each party. The Vivaresi chose one Sulimano, while the Maltraversi nominated Pilio da Celsano. Pilio, without consulting his colleague, intrigued with Giacomo de' Bernardi, a Bolognese, agreeing to have him elected Podesta on the condition of throwing all his weight against the Ecelin party. This was carried through, and Giacomo de' Bernardi, being elected, gave judgment against Ecelin and banished him. Ecelin in revenge took up arms, but the Podesta and the Maltraversi proved too strong and he was expelled. With him also went the Bishop Pistore. In the conflict half the city was burnt. Verci, Vol. ii. p. 111.

² The vow now fulfilled by his retirement to Oliero: to give "his life to God, his gettings to the Church," because his wife was saved.

³ This was Elcorte, whose child, according to Browning, Sordello was, reputed to be brought up by Adelaide in gratitude for the father's sacrifice. See *Introd.*, end of § 11.

⁴ Taurello recalls his own loss, how he was shown the charred remains said to be those of Retrude, and how even at the time he failed to find any evidence of his child. It is like Browning to suggest thus in a line a hint of doubt as to the truth of the story lying ready to germinate in Taurello's mind.

- " Of that to me, and we pull, any how
 " Este, into a heap : the matter's now
 " At the true juncture slipping us so oft.
 " Ay, Heinrich died and Otho, please you, doffed
 " His crown at such a juncture ! Still, if holds
 " Our Friedrich's purpose, if this chain enfolds
 " The neck of ¹ . . . who but this same Ecelin
 " That must recoil when the best days begin !
 " Recoil ? that's nought ; if the recoiler leaves
 " His name for me to fight with, no one grieves :
 " But he must interfere, forsooth, unlock
 " His cloister to become my stumbling-block
 " Just as of old ! Ay, ay, there 'tis again—
 " The land's inevitable Head—explain
 " The reverences that subject us ! Count
 " These Ecelins now ! Not to say as fount,
 " Originating power of thought,—from twelve
 " That drop i' the trenches they joined hands to
 delve,
 " Six shall surpass him, but . . . why men must twine
 " Somehow with something ! Ecelin's a fine
 " Clear name ! 'Twere simpler, doubtless, twine with
 me
 " At once : our cloistered friend's capacity
 " Was of a sort ! I had to share myself
 " In fifty portions, like an o'ertasked elf
 " That's forced illume in fifty points the vast
 " Rare vapour he's environed by. At last
 " My strengths, though sorely frittered, e'en converge
 " And crown . . . no, Bacchus, they have yet to urge
 " The man be crowned !
 " That aloe, an he durst,
 " Would climb ! Just such a bloated sprawler first
 " I noted in Messina's castle-court
 " The day I came, when Heinrich asked in sport
 " If I would pledge my faith to win him back
 " His right in Lombardy : ' for, once bid pack
 " ' Marauders,' he continued, ' in my stead

Shall he
 accept
 the
 badge ?

760

What's
 in a
 name ?

770

780

754. Still if] Let but . . .

¹ Taurello would fill in his own name, but dare not. He shrinks as ever from the responsibility, though ready to fight his best beneath the faintest shadow of a name.

- Book IV “ ‘ You rule, Taurello ! ’ and upon this head
 “ Laid the silk glove of Constance—I see her
 “ Too, mantled head to foot in miniver,
 “ Retrude following !
 “ I am absolved
 “ From further toil : the empery devolved
 “ On me, ’twas Tito’s word : I have to lay 790
 “ For once my plan, pursue my plan my way,
 “ Prompt nobody, and render an account
 “ Taurello to Taurello ! Nay, I mount
 What a future acceptance of the post offers ! “ To Friedrich : he conceives the post I kept,
 “ —Who did true service, able or inept,
 “ Who’s worthy guerdon, Ecelin or I.
 “ Me guerdoned, counsel follows : would he vie
 “ With the Pope really ? Azzo, Boniface
 “ Compose a right-arm Hohenstauffen’s race
 “ Must break ere govern Lombardy. I point 800
 “ How easy ’twere to twist, once out of joint,
 “ The socket from the bone : my Azzo’s stare
 “ Meanwhile ! for I, this idle strap to wear,
 “ Shall—fret myself abundantly, what end
 “ To serve ? There’s left me twenty years to spend
 Is it worth it without an heir ? “ —How better than my old way ? Had I one
 “ Who laboured to o’erthrow my work—a son
 “ Hatching with Azzo superb treachery,
 “ To root my pines up and then poison me,
 “ Suppose—’twere worth while frustrate that ! Beside
 “ Another life’s ordained me : the world’s tide 811
 “ Rolls, and what hope of parting from the press
 “ Of waves, a single wave through weariness
 “ Gently lifted aside, laid upon shore ?
 “ My life must be lived out in foam and roar,
 “ No question. Fifty years the province held
 “ Taurello ; troubles raised, and troubles quelled,
 “ He in the midst—who leaves this quaint stone place,
 “ These trees a year or two, then not a trace
 “ Of him ! How obtain hold, fetter men’s tongues 820
 “ Like this poor minstrel with the foolish songs—
 “ To which, despite our bustle, he is linked ?
 “ —Flowers one may teaze, that never grow extinct.

807. to] omitted. 814. Gently lifted] That’s gently led . .
 821. poor minstrel] Sordello. 823. grow] seem.

" Ay, that patch, surely, green as ever, where
 " I set Her Moorish lentisk, by the stair,
 " To overawe the aloes ; and we trod
 " Those flowers, how call you such ?—into the sod ;
 " A stately foreigner—a world of pain
 " To make it thrive, arrest rough winds—all vain !
 " It would decline ; these would not be destroyed : 830
 " And now, where is it ? where can you avoid
 " The flowers ? I frighten children twenty years
 " Longer !—which way, too, Ecelin appears
 " To thwart me, for his son's besotted youth
 " Gives promise of the proper tiger-tooth :
 " They feel it at Vicenza ! Fate, fate, fate,
 " My fine Taurello ! Go you, promulgate
 " Friedrich's decree, and here's shall aggrandize
 " Young Ecelin—your Prefect's badge ! a prize
 " Too precious, certainly.

Book IV
 Fate,
 fate,
 fate !

" How now ? Compete 840
 " With my old comrade ? shuffle from their seat
 " His children ? Paltry dealing ! Don't I know
 " Ecelin ? now, I think, and years ago !
 " What's changed—the weakness ? did not I compound
 " For that, and undertake to keep him sound
 " Despite it ? Here's Taurello hankering
 " After a boy's preferment—this plaything
 " To carry, Bacchus ! " And he laughed.

The
 claim of
 loyalty to
 Ecelin

Remark
 Why schemes wherein cold-blooded men embark
 Prosper, when your enthusiastic sort 850
 Fail : while these last are ever stopping short—
 (So much they should—so little they can do !)
 The careless tribe see nothing to pursue
 If they desist ; meantime their scheme succeeds.

Thoughts were caprices in the course of deeds
 Methodic with Taurello ; so, he turned,—
 Enough amused by fancies fairly earned
 Of Este's horror-struck submitted neck,
 And Richard, the cowed braggart, at his beck,—
 To his own petty but immediate doubt 860

He comes
 back to
 fact from
 fancy

836. They feel it] They prattle . . . 845. keep him] pre-
 serve him. 846. Here's . . . a boy] say . . . the boy.
 852. So much they should] Much to be done. 859. Richard,
 the cowed braggart] Boniface completely.

Book IV If he could pacify the League without
 Conceding Richard ; just to this was brought
 That interval of vain discursive thought !
 As, shall I say, some Ethiop, past pursuit
 Of all enslavers, dips a shackled foot
 Burnt to the blood, into the drowsy black
 Enormous watercourse which guides him back
 The Ethi- To his own tribe again, where he is king ;
 opian And laughs because he guesses, numbering
 king The yellower poison-wattles on the pouch 870
 Of the first lizard wrested from its couch
 Under the slime (whose skin, the while, he strips
 To cure his nostril with, and festered lips,
 And eyeballs bloodshot through the desert-blast)
 That he has reached its boundary, at last
 May breathe ;—thinks o'er enchantments of the South
 Sovereign to plague his enemies, their mouth,
 Eyes, nails, and hair ; but, these enchantments tried
 In fancy, puts them soberly aside
 For truth, projects a cool return with friends, 880
 The likelihood of winning mere amends
 Ere long ; thinks that, takes comfort silently,
 Then, from the river's brink, his wrongs and he,
 Hugging revenge close to their hearts, are soon
 Off-striding for the Mountains of the Moon.¹
 Midnight : the watcher nodded on his spear,
 Since clouds dispersing left a passage clear
 For any meagre and discoloured moon
 To venture forth ; and such was peering soon
 Above the harassed city—her close lanes 890
 Closer, not half so tapering her fanes,
 As though she shrunk into herself to keep
 What little life was saved, more safely. Heap
 By heap the watch-fires mouldered, and beside
 The blackest spoke Sordello and replied
 Palma with none to listen. “ 'Tis your cause :

867. watercourse, etc.] water current, his sole track. 880.
 projects a cool return] cool projects, a return. 881. mere]
 wild.

¹ The point of the simile is that the Ethiopian king, like
 Salinguerra, after planning wild and impractical schemes, comes
 back to deal sensibly with the hard facts of the immediate future,

" What makes a Ghibellin ? There should be laws ¹ — Book IV
 " (Remember how my youth escaped ! I trust Palma
 " To you for manhood, Palma ! tell me just and
 " As any child)—there must be laws at work 900 Sordello
 " Explaining this. Assure me, good may lurk by the
 " Under the bad,—my multitude has part watch-
 " In your designs, their welfare is at heart fire
 " With Salinguerra, to their interest
 " Refer the deeds he dwelt on,—so divest
 " Our conference of much that scared me. Why
 " Affect that heartless tone to Tito ? I
 " Esteemed myself, yes, in my inmost mind
 " This morn, a recreant to my race—mankind
 " O'erlooked till now : why boast my spirit's force, 910
 " —Such force denied its object ? why divorce
 " These, then admire my spirit's flight the same
 " As though it bore up, helped some half-orbed flame
 " Else quenched in the dead void, to living space ² ?
 " That orb cast off to chaos and disgrace,
 " Why vaunt so much my unencumbered dance,
 " Making a feat's facilities enhance
 " Its marvel ? But I front Taurello, one
 " Of happier fate, and all I should have done,

900. there must be laws] laws secretly at work. 909. my race] that wide.

913-14 reads—

" As though it bore a burden, which could tame
 No pinion, from dead void to living space."

915. Cast off] consigned. 916. So—dance] complacently my frantic dance.

¹ Sordello, whose eyes have been rudely opened to the real motives of selfish men, still would cling to his ideal and seek to find beneath these " strange ways of serving men " a substratum of good purpose for mankind.

² The passage 901-918 may be paraphrased thus:—Assure me, he says to Palma, that good may lurk beneath the bad—that my multitude has a part in these Ghibelline schemes of yours—that Salinguerra has their interest at heart despite appearances to the contrary. Yet, if such were the case, why assume that heartless tone to Tito ? This morning I held myself a very recreant to my race, for I saw clearly how when I should have been straining every nerve to raise upwards towards the light these poor creatures in their world of darkness, I was actually priding myself on doing nothing and thinking I was all the greater for my superiority and splendid isolation.

Book IV " He does ; the people's good being paramount 920
 " With him, their progress may perhaps account
 " For his abiding still ¹ ; whereas you heard
 " The talk with Tito—the excuse preferred
 " For burning those five hostages,—and broached
 " By way of blind, as you and I approached,
 " I do believe."

The self-
 fishness
 of Guelf
 and
 Ghibellin
 alike re-
 vealed

She spoke : then he, " My thought
 " Plainlier expressed ! All to your profit—nought
 " Meantime of these, of conquests to achieve
 " For them, of wretchedness he might relieve
 " While profiting your party. Azzo, too, 930
 " Supports a cause : what cause ? Do Guelfs pursue
 " Their ends by means like yours, or better ? "

When
 The Guelfs were proved alike, men weighed with men,
 And deed with deed, blaze, blood, with blood and blaze.
 Morn borke : " Once more, Sordello, meet its gaze
 " Proudly—the people's charge against thee fails
 " In every point, while either party quails !
 " These are the busy ones : be silent thou !
 " Two parties take the world up, and allow
 " No third, yet have one principle, subsist 940
 " By the same injustice ; whoso shall enlist
 " With either, ranks with man's inveterate foes.
 " So there is one less quarrel to compose :
 " The Guelf, the Ghibellin may be to curse—
 " I have done nothing, but both sides do worse
 " Than nothing.² Nay, to me, forgotten, reft

920. the people's good] the multitude aye . . . 927. to your]
 Friedrich's. 920. your party] that Friedrich. 933. weighed]
 ranged. 941. injustice] method.

¹ Sordello is hoping against hope and defending Taurello against his own convictions as to his motives: perhaps, he says, he *has* sacrificed his prospects to his principles, and that is why he still remains in a subordinate position; and yet he burns five hostages and then puts forward a trumpery excuse because we came in. Can one possibly believe that such a man cares one iota for the people?

² Browning, in later years at any rate, was no admirer of the negative goodness which Sordello here claims as a virtue. Cf. *The Statue and the Bust*—

" Let a man contend to the uttermost
 For his life's set prize be it what it will !
 The counter our lovers staked was lost

" Of insight, lapped by trees and flowers, was left
 " The notion of a service—ha ? What lured
 " Me here, what mighty aim was I assured
 " Must move Taurello ? What if there remained 950
 " A cause, intact, distinct from these, ordained
 " For me, its true discoverer ? "

Some one pressed

Before them here, a watcher, to suggest
 The subject for a ballad : " They must know
 " The tale of the dead worthy, long ago
 " Consul of Rome—that's long ago for us,
 " Minstrels and bowmen, idly squabbling thus
 " In the world's corner—but too late no doubt,
 " For the brave time he sought to bring about.
 " —Not know Crescentius Nomentanus¹ ? " Then 960
 He cast about for terms to tell him, when
 Sordello disavowed it, how they used
 Whenever their Superior introduced
 A novice to the Brotherhood—" for I
 " Was just a brown-sleeve brother, merrily
 " Appointed too," quoth he, " till Innocent
 " Bade me relinquish, to my small content,
 " My wife or my brown sleeves ")—some brother spoke
 Ere nocturns of Crescentius, to revoke
 The edict issued, after his demise, 970
 Which blotted fame alike and effigies,
 All out except a floating power, a name

The
Archer's
tale

950-52 reads—

" Moved Salinguerra ? If a cause remained
 Intact, distinct from these, and fate ordained
 For all the past, that cause for me ? One," etc.

971. fame alike] memories.

As surely as if it were lawful coin :
 And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost
 Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin
 Though the end in sight was a vice, I say."

¹ Crescentius, having persuaded the Roman people to restore the ancient idea of a republic, ruled as Consul in Rome from 980-998. On the death of the reigning Pope he nominated his own candidate in opposition to that of the Emperor. Otho III. descended on Rome with an army and put both Crescentius and his Papal nominee to death. Browning gleaned this incident from Sismondi probably (see *Hist. des Rep. Ital.*, c. iii.).

Book IV Including, tending to produce the same
 Cres- Great act. Rome, dead, forgotten, lived at least
 centius Within that brain, though to a vulgar priest
 Nomen- And a vile stranger,—two not worth a slave
 tanus Of Rome's, Pope John, King Otho,—fortune gave
 The rule there : so, Crescentius, haply dressed
 In white, called Roman Consul for a jest,
 Taking the people at their word, forth stepped 980
 As upon Brutus' heel, nor ever kept
 Rome waiting,—stood erect, and from his brain
 Gave Rome out on its ancient place again,
 Ay, bade proceed with Brutus' Rome, Kings styled
 Themselves mere citizens of, and, beguiled
 Into great thoughts thereby, would choose the gem
 Out of a lapfull, spoil their diadem
 —The Senate's cypher was so hard to scratch ¹ !
 He flashes like a phanal, all men catch
 The flame, Rome's just accomplished ! when returned 990
 Otho, with John, the Consul's step had spurned,
 And Hugo Lord of Este, to redress
 The wrongs of each. Crescentius in the stress
 His fate Of adverse fortune bent. " They crucified
 " Their Consul in the Forum ; and abide
 " E'er since such slaves at Rome, that I—(for I
 " Was once a brown-sleeve brother, merrily
 " Appointed)—I had option to keep wife
 " Or keep brown sleeves, and managed in the strife
 " Lose both. A song of Rome ! "
 And Rome, indeed, 1000
 Robed at Goito in fantastic weed,
 The Mother-City of his Mantuan days,
 Looked an established point of light whence rays
 Rome's Traversed the world ; for, all the clustered homes
 the Beside of men, seemed bent on being Romes
 Cause for In their degree ; the question was, how each
 Sordello Should most resemble Rome, clean out of reach.

982. Rome] us. 990. just] omitted.

¹ This must mean that Crescentius found it easier to found a tyranny under the name of a republic than to revive the full republican régime ; so he chose the gem out of it—the consulate—for himself, but deemed it advisable not to replace the senate—the peculiar power of the senate being so difficult to revive, or, in his phrase, their signature so hard to copy.

Nor, of the Two, did either principle
Struggle to change, but to possess Rome,—still
Guelf Rome or Ghibellin Rome.

Let Rome advance ! 1010

Rome, as she struck Sordello's ignorance—
How could he doubt one moment ? Rome's the Cause !
Rome of the Pandects,¹ all the world's new laws—
Of the Capitol, of Castle Angelo² ;
New structures, that inordinately glow,
Subdued, brought back to harmony, made ripe
By many a relic of the archetype
Extant for wonder ; every upstart church
That hoped to leave old temples in the lurch,
Corrected by the Theatre forlorn 1020
That,—as a mundane shell, its world late born,—
Lay and o'ershadowed it.³ These hints combined,

1007. Nor of the two did] Herself nor struggled . . .
1008-9 reads—

“To change what is aspired possess—Rome still
For Frederick or Honorius. Rome's the Cause !”

1011-12] omitted. 1014. The Capitol turned Castle Angelo.
1016-19] omitted. 1022. Lay and o'ershadowed it] Verona that's
beside it.

¹ A collection of Laws systematically arranged from the works of Roman writers on jurisprudence published by the Emperor Justinian in 529 A.D. The revival of the study of Roman Law was one of the great features of the Renaissance. Hallam says : “The revival of the study of jurisprudence as derived from the laws of Justinian has generally been ascribed to a discovery made of a copy of the Pandects at Amalfi in 1135 A.D., when that city was taken by the Pisans. . . . The study of law having thus revived, made a surprising progress : within fifty years Lombardy was full of lawyers, on whom Frederic Barbarossa and Alexander III. conspired to shower privileges and honours. The schools of Bologna were prominent throughout this century for legal learning.”

² The Capitol represented the secular, Castle Angelo the religious, aspect of Roman government. The two are to converge in Sordello's Rome. Note the reading of the 1st edition.

³ Sordello's conception of his new Rome was to be a city in which the glories of the new thought and learning were to be tempered and subdued by the lessons of the past, in which was to be combined all the best features alike of past and present. The Roman Coliseum suggests an analogy, which at this time had many churches built within its walls. “The Coliseum was bristling with churches. There were four dedicated to the Saviour, a fifth to S. James, a sixth to S. Agatha, besides other

Book IV Rome typifies the scheme to put mankind
 Once more in full possession of their rights.
 " Let us have Rome again ! On me it lights
 " To build up Rome—on me, the first and last :
 " For such a future was endured the past ! "
 And thus, in the grey twilight, forth he sprung
 To give his thought consistency among
 The very People—let their facts avail
 Finish the dream grown from the archer's tale.

1030

chapels and oratories within the amphitheatre itself (Duff, *Expos. of Sordello*, quoted from Lanciani). That " The Theatre " refers to the Coliseum is seen by the reading of the 1st edition—the Veronese amphitheatre being, next to the Coliseum, the most famous in Italy.

BOOK V

INTRODUCTION

THE narrative in the fifth book is very brief. Sordello, whose last and loveliest dream lies shattered at the first touch of reality, yet still clinging amid the ruin of his hopes to his ideal of a Rome "indebted to no Palatine," makes a last effort to draw Salinguerra to his side. He seeks the presence-chamber and once more pleads the people's cause. At first ruined through his self-consciousness, the speech gradually grows in power as he loses himself in his subject. As he draws to a close, Taurello, with a sudden mad impulse, throws the badge across Sordello's neck, making him thereby Romano's chief. Then, to their mutual amazement, the true relationship between Salinguerra and Sordello as father and son dawns simultaneously upon them both. The truth once known, Palma tells the story of Sordello's birth and concealment in the flight from Vicenza related to her by Adelaide as she lay upon her deathbed. The story over, Sordello signs to them to leave him alone, and Palma takes Taurello to the gallery below, where in a whirlwind of excitement he plans and plots for the imaginary kingdom which he is to form for his new-discovered son. In the midst of his wild, almost incoherent, discourse a sound is heard in the chamber above. Dashing up, they rush into the presence-chamber, to find Sordello with the badge beneath his foot—dead.

The main portion of the book, however, is occupied with Sordello's speech before Salinguerra, and the train of thought which in the end led up to this great final effort. The keynote is "the dream grown from the archer's tale"—that is, the story of Crescentius as told at the close of Book iv.

Related, as it was, in the early hours of the morning, it formed the text of Sordello's meditations throughout the day. As he wandered through Ferrara he explored the possibilities which the notion of a consul sitting as

acknowledged arbiter between Guelf and Ghibelline presented to his mind.

But Sordello is no longer quite the dreamer he was of old: His eyes have been opened. He has learnt that fancy cannot be materialized without taking into account real men and women. Facts may be ugly, but they must be faced. It is upon this rock of reality that his argosy is wrecked. As he looks round upon the people the query is inevitably borne in upon his mind—

“Art possessed
of thy wish now, rewarded for thy quest
To-day among Ferrara’s squalid sons?
Are this and this the shining ones
meet for the shining city?”

As evening draws on he finds himself once more upon the terrace of the San Pietro palace, summing up amid the lengthening shadows the evidence of his day’s experience as opposed to the possibility of spiritualized Rome.

Firm to his resolution to “let the facts avail” to try his dream city by the test of reason, he gives full weight to the practical difficulties which present themselves, with the inevitable result that the whole conception dies still-born. But before he acknowledges the failure of his last and loveliest dream he glances back across the past and learns therefrom a lesson, that “collective man outstrips the individual.” Each age, he perceives, produces men whose ideas are in advance of their time—men who fail, yet in whose very failure lies the germ of success for others; men who have undaunted sought “the high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard.” These, even as Sordello himself, have grasped “time’s completed plan,” but have failed by seeking to force upon the world that for which the raw material (human nature) was not yet ready. He learns too another aspect of the same truth, that no one, however great, can be absolutely perfect or original. Every artist or craftsman is linked both to the past and to the future. He is the product of what is gone before and the forerunner of what is to come. Our nature and our art teems with those “fallings from us, vanishings,” which bespeak our debt to “worlds not realized.”

Sordello is not the first nor will he be the last to bring a message to the world, but so far he has lacked the one effective quality which alone produces results—namely, the power to seize the present and to press it into the service of the future—

“God has conceded two sights to man—
one, of man’s whole work, time’s completed plan
the other, of the minute’s work, man’s first
step to the plan’s completeness.”

This union of the dreamer and the worker is to be found in every man who has left his mark in the world. Turning to history, Browning emphasizes three stages—the age of material force typified by Charlemagne when strength by stress of strength is the keynote—“unfeeling thence strong therefore”; then the stage where the spiritual ideal is grafted on to the material “strength by stress of knowledge” of which Hildebrand is the supreme example, “whence feeling, therefore stronger”; and finally the third stage, not yet reached, when knowledge by stress of knowledge, “unfeeling and yet feeling, strongest thence,” shall be the keynote. This last stage, of which Sordello’s idealism is the type, foreshadowing a time when the power that will enforce goodness will be the mere perception that the end is right. The knowledge that a thing is right will be sufficient to ensure its performance, no machinery will then be needed to enforce upon society a code of law beyond the dictates of its own consciousness.

Amid the welter of the political world steps towards this reign of peace may be traced. The crusades, ridding Europe of much of its most difficult and turbulent element, have cleared the ground for the reception of new forces. The League or union of the many weak against the few strong has put a new weapon in the hands of the people and shifted the balance of power; the Truce of God has proclaimed the dawn of peace. What is the next step and who is the man to take it? Is this the hour, and is Sordello the man? Once more and for the last time the dreamer and the political man of action within Sordello struggle for the mastery. That he is neither a Charlemagne nor a Hildebrand he is aware; neither the physical nor the mental strength is

his to lift the load that "Paul had moaned and Moses dropped beneath"—yet one true blow he will yet strike for the people with whom he is now identified. Their champion shall not fail them though he be defeated and the battle lost. There is yet a chance if Salinguerra can be won, and to Salinguerra he goes forthwith. At the start the speech which follows strikes the wrong note. The fatal vanity and self-consciousness which has already spoilt so much of Sordello's success mars this effort also. In the first place, it is utterly unconvincing. Sordello is not thinking of the people, but of himself. Instead of pleading the cause with which he has now so utterly identified himself, he contents himself with the enunciation of trite platitudes about the Papal Supremacy and the need of purging Lombardy of her barons. To think of convincing Taurello with political claptrap of this kind is ridiculous, especially when we remember that Sordello is not even in earnest, but is busy all the time wondering what they think of him. Taurello, whose consummate tact never fails him, takes his youthful catechist with all seriousness, until, his patience exhausted, he interrupts and in a few sarcastic phrases exposes the futility of Sordello's arguments by pointing out the effect such action would have upon Palma's plans, closing with a few words of caustic irony as to the value of minstrels as statesmen.

Taurello's obvious contempt at last arouses Sordello. In a flash he sees the truth. He drops the ill-fitting garments of the political philosopher and stands forth as the poet.

"Scorn the poet? They, for once,
Asking 'what was,' obtained a full response."

In the portion of the speech that follows we have Sordello at last at his best. He is on familiar ground. He is worthy of his theme and his theme of him. Taurello has at last touched the hidden spring, and the oracle speaks. His subject is twofold: first comes the claim that the poet must be earth's essential king, and then comes the second subject, consequent upon the truth of the first, that the work of the poet has been and indeed must be solely for the people's good. That

selfishness cannot exist in the true poet, who, come life, come death, must serve the cause of others.

The line Sordello takes is based upon the truth that "thought is the soul of act," that the thinker must precede the man of action. Going back to the very dawn of history he claims for the thinker the first protest against chaos, attributes to him the elements of order, gradually increasing until with the first dawn of song civilization had its birth. The modern jargon about "men of action," the "great men" in the people's dialect, is an inversion of the truth. What is Salinguerra with all his skill of hand and brain, his political insight and genius for war, compared to Sordello the poet? Can he for a moment mistake his true relations or fail to realize who is lord, who liegeman? Sordello, though he has failed to help the world, though he has wasted alike powers and opportunities, is still a poet

"ordained its champion from eternity."

Nothing can take his royalty from him, though he yet may never use it for the purpose for which it was ordained. What, then, is the poet's function? He is, as it were, a human microcosm, for in him is reflected the joys and sorrows of mankind; he has but to share out the riches of his soul, to use his endowments, to benefit mankind. This is where Sordello has failed: he has never learnt that priceless truth, that to save his soul he must lose it. Now, when it is too late, he knows his error. Yet even so, for all his failure everything is not lost. Thought is indestructible, and the poet's life is not terminated by death. Though he die, his thought passes on, "producing deeds, but not by deeds," swaying the world and moulding mankind, weaving the garment of God's Will. Then, passing on to the poet as teacher, he shows how it is the bard who is both judge and teacher—his verdict on mankind is final (quoting Dante)—

"I enwomb
Some wretched Frederick with his redhot tomb;
Some dubious spirit, Lombard Agilulph
With the black chastening river I engulf."

So, too, as teacher it is the poet who forms the moral standard of his age, holding up virtue and condemning

vice, consciously shaping the good and the evil and forming the character of his time. Yet, like the material world around him, the poet is the product of evolution from simple to complex. The primitive bard marshalling "Life's elemental masque" is but the first of a series who even now have progressed far on their way towards complete mastery of the mysteries of human nature, and shall one day unveil to wondering man that last of mysteries—man's inmost life. To this end everything tends. Every poet is to some extent the essence of his predecessors, and in one point an advance upon them all: he is a stone in the structure, small perhaps, but necessary. So, even as at Venice, that mart of the world, beneath the shadow of the great cathedral's dome one may see the traces and evidence of countless religions, all of which have been, as it were, steps leading to the consummation revealed in Christianity, so one day will arise the consummation of the poet's art.

The effect which Sordello's effort produced was hardly what its author contemplated. It was at once a success and a failure. It certainly had not the slightest effect in shaking Taurello's loyalty, much less in changing his politics, but it revealed to him a practical point which had an immense bearing on the whole situation—namely, that Palma was in love with Sordello. Palma was the keystone of the whole political arch; if she loved and married Sordello the whole Ghibelline cause was lost, and Salinguerra knew enough of Palma to know that love such as hers would sacrifice everything to its ideal. With an intuition almost uncanny he promptly did the one and only thing which might save the situation, to make Sordello Romano's head. It was, in fact, a great victory for Sordello; it was also an appalling temptation. It was a tacit acknowledgment of all that Sordello had just claimed for the Poet. From a practical standpoint it was a solution of all Taurello's difficulties. It gave a leader to the cause, it gave a name for Taurello to fight under, it retained Palma! A mad act it was, but one with much method in it; one of those intuitions behind which lies a long chain of rapid inferences, so rapid as to be taken as a rule for impulse. Sordello now dominates the situation: all depends upon his decision; will he accept and renounce his principles or will he refuse?

BOOK THE FIFTH

Book V

Is it the same Sordello in the dusk
 As at the dawn?—merely a perished husk
 Now, that arose a power fit to build
 Up Rome again? The proud conception chilled
 So soon? Ay, watch that latest dream of thine
 —A Rome indebted to no Palatine ¹—
 Drop arch by arch, Sordello! Art possessed
 Of thy wish now, rewarded for thy quest
 To-day among Ferrara's squalid sons?
 Are this and this and this the shining ones
 Meet for the Shining City? Sooth to say,
 Your favoured tenantry pursue their way
 After a fashion! This companion slips
 On the smooth causey, t'other blinkard trips
 At his mooned sandal. "Leave to lead the brawls
 "Here i' the atria?" No, friend! He that sprawls
 On aught but a stibadium . . . what his dues
 Who puts the lustral vase to such an use ²?
 Oh, huddle up the day's disasters! March,
 Ye runagates, and drop thou, arch by arch, 20
 Rome!

The raw
10 material
for the
new
Rome

Yet before they quite disband—a whim ³—

7. possessed] possest. 12. Your] Our. 17. . . . what his
 dues] suffers . . . goose . . . 18. Who puts] Puttest our.

¹ The Palatine was the site of the Imperial palace: Sordello's Rome would need neither king nor palace, for was it not to be the new Jerusalem?

² These lines are illustrative of the hopeless depravity of the masses, by way of bringing home the futility of Sordello's dream if looked at as a practical issue. A stibadium was the Roman couch.

³ Browning leads up to the enunciation of the truth (which was forced upon Sordello by the contrast between the real and the ideal) that "collective man outstrips the individual" by an illustration drawn from the gradual development of architecture. The anticipation of evolution throughout the book is remarkable,

Book V Study mere shelter, now, for him, and him,
 Nay, even the worst,—just house them! Any cave
 Suffices: throw out earth! A loophole? Brave!
 They ask to feel the sun shine, see the grass
 Grow, hear the larks sing? Dead art thou, alas,
 And I am dead! But here's our son excels
 At hurdle-weaving any Scythian, fells
 Oak and devises rafters, dreams and shapes
 His dream into a door-post, just escapes 30
 The mystery of hinges. Lie we both
 Perdue another age. The goodly growth
 Of brick and stone! Our building-pelt was rough,
 But that descendant's garb suits well enough
 A portico-contriver. Speed the years—
 What's time to us? At last, a city rears
 Itself! nay, enter—what's the grave to us?
 Lo, our forlorn acquaintance carry thus
 The head! Successively sewer, forum, cirque—
 Last age, an aqueduct was counted work, 40
 But now they tire the artificer upon
 Blank alabaster, black obsidion,
 —Careful, Jove's face be duly fulgorant,
 And mother Venus' kiss-creased nipples pant
 Back into pristine pulpiness, ere fixed
 Above the baths. What difference betwixt
 This Rome and ours—resemblance what, between
 That scurvy dumb-show and this pageant sheen—
 These Romans and our rabble? Use thy wit!
 The work marched, step by step,—a workman fit 50
 Took each, nor too fit,—to one task, one time,—
 No leaping o'er the petty to the prime,¹
 When just the substituting osier lithe
 For brittle bulrush, sound wood for soft withe,
 To further loam-and-roughcast-work a stage,—

22. mere] a. 23. the worse] him. 30. His] that. 36. At
 last] And lo! 38. Lo,] So. 39. The] A. 40. an] that. 48.
 That . . . this] the . . . the. 49. Use] Rest. 50. The work
 marched] And listen. 51. Took] with. 54. brittle, sound, soft]
 all omitted; "and often" inserted.

remembering that it was written twenty years before the publica-
 tion of the *Origin of Species*.

¹ This was the lesson Sordello had to learn.

Exacts an architect, exacts an age :
 No tables of the Mauritanian tree
 For men whose maple log's their luxury ¹ !
 That way was Rome built. "Better" (say you) Sordello's
 "merge" method

"At once all workmen in the demiurge, 60
 "All epochs in a lifetime, every task
 "In one!" So should the sudden city bask
 I' the day—while those we'd feast there, want the
 knack

Of keeping fresh-chalked gowns from speck and brack,
 Distinguish not rare peacock from vile swan,
 Nor Mareotic juice from Cæcuban.²
 "Enough of Rome! 'Twas happy to conceive
 "Rome on a sudden, nor shall fate bereave
 "Me of that credit: for the rest, her spite
 "Is an old story—serves my folly right 70
 "By adding yet another to the dull
 "List of abortions—things proved beautiful
 "Could they be done, Sordello cannot do."³

He sat upon the terrace, plucked and threw
 The powdery aloe-cusps away, saw shift
 Rome's walls, and drop arch after arch, and drift
 Mist-like afar those pillars of all stripe,
 Mounds of all majesty. "Thou archetype,
 "Last of my dreams and loveliest, depart!"
 And then a low voice wound into his heart: 80
 "Sordello!" (low as some old Pythoness

59. That . . . built] And Rome's accomplished! 62. So . . .
 bask] undoubtedly. 65. rare . . . vile] your . . . your. 67.
 Enough of Rome] Nay sneer . . . enough! 69. me] us. 70. my
 folly] us very . . . 72. abortions] devices. 81. low as some
 old] lower than a.

¹ Browning's way of saying that people who think 'deal' is a luxury cannot go hankering after mahogany.

² Sordello forgets the slow development of man: what would be the use, even if Rome could be built in a day, of doing it, if the people therein were centuries behind in morals and intellect? The practical point is how can he hope these brawling ignorant Romans will ever appreciate or carry out his dream of a spiritualized Rome?

³ The history of Rome is full of abortive efforts, such as that of Crescentius, ruined by the fickleness and turbulence of the Roman mob. Sordello's effort, if he ever makes it, will but add another name to the list of failures. Sordello has already learnt much.

Book V Conceding to a Lydian King's distress

The cause of his long error—one mistake

Of her past oracle) ¹ " Sordello, wake !

" God has conceded two sights to a man—

Man's
two sights " One, of men's whole work, time's completed plan,
" The other, of the minute's work, man's first

" Step to the plan's completeness : what's dispersed

" Save hope of that supreme step which, descried

" Earliest, was meant still to remain untried 90

" Only to give you heart to take your own

" Step, and there stay, leaving the rest alone ?

" Where is the vanity ? Why count as one

" The first step, with the last step ? What is gone

" Except Rome's æry magnificence,

" That last step you'd take first ?—an evidence

" You were God : be man now ! Let those glances fall !

" The basis, the beginning step of all,

" Which proves you just a man—is that gone too ?

" Pity to disconcert one versed as you 100

" In fate's ill-nature ! but its full extent

" Eludes Sordello, even : the veil rent,

" Col- " Read the black writing—that collective man
lective " Outstrips the individual. Who began
man out- " The acknowledged greatnesses ? Ay, your own art
strips the
indi- " Shall serve us : put the poet's mimes apart—
vidual." " Close with the poet's self, and lo, a dim

" Yet too plain form divides itself from him !

" Alcamo's song enmeshes the lulled Isle,

" Woven into the echoes left erewhile 110

" By Nina, one soft web of song : no more

" Turning his name, then, flower-like o'er and o'er !

" An elder poet in the younger's place ;

" Nina's strength, but Alcamo's the grace :

85-92] omitted. 95. Rome's] that. 97. God . . . be man now] were . . . no matter. 99. Just a man] one of us. 105. The acknowledged greatnesses] The greatnesses you know ? 107. poet's self, and lo] the poet-closer—what ? 114. reads. Take Nina's strength but lose Alcamo's grace.

¹ Croesus, King of Lydia, consulted the oracle of Apollo concerning the Persian War, and was told that if he made war he would overthrow a great power. He was defeated, and upon asking for an explanation was told that he might have asked whose kingdom was meant. (Herodotus, Bk. i. c. xcii.)

" Each neutralizes ¹ each then ! Search your fill ;
 " You get no whole and perfect Poet—still
 " New Ninas, Alcamos, till time's mid-night
 " Shrouds all—or better say, the shutting light
 " Of a forgotten yesterday. Dissect
 " Every ideal workman ²—(to reject
 " In favour of your fearful ignorance ³
 " The thousand phantasms eager to advance,
 " And point you but to those within your reach)—
 " Were you the first who brought—(in modern speech)
 " The Multitude to be materialized ?
 " That loose eternal unrest—who devised
 " An apparition i' the midst ? The rout
 " Was checked, a breathless ring was formed about
 " That sudden flower : get round at any risk
 " The gold-rough pointel, silver-blazing disk
 " O' the lily ! Swords across it ! Reign thy reign
 " And serve thy frolic service, Charlemagne ⁴ !

Book V
 Self-ex-
 pression
 never
 perfect

120

130

The great
 forces of
 the past

115. Search] Gaze. 123. point] refer. 124. brought, etc.] got, to use plain speech.

¹ Cf. Letters, vol. i. p. 58. " For never did man . . . like a thing, not to say love it, but I liked and loved it, one liking neutralizing the rebellious stir of its fellow, so that I don't go about now wanting the fixed stars before my time ; this world has not escaped me, thank God ; and, what other people say is the best of it, may not escape me after all, though until so very lately I made up my mind to do without it."—R. B. to E. E. B., May 1845."

This was just what Sordello was going through.

² Ll. 116-120. In 1st edition read—

" Search further and the past presents you still
 New Nina's, new Alcamo's, time's midnight
 Concluding—better say it's evenlight
 Of Yesterday. You now in this respect
 Of benefitting people (to reject
 The favour of . . . "

No one in this world is perfect, but however great poet or artist may be, he but expresses one part of the divine sympathy in which all past and present, great and small, have their places.

³ A Browning comment. Ciullo d'Alcano, one of the earliest of Sicilian poets ; Nina, a Sicilian poetess, sometime called Nina of Dante, from the love she bore Dante of Majano, a poet she had never seen. (Duff, quoted from Tiraboschi.)

⁴ Mankind only passes from his natural condition of being an aggregate of incoherent individuals (*i.e.* loose eternal unrest) to become a coherent homogeneous body (*i.e.* materialized)

Book V " —The very child of over-joyousness,
 Charle- " Unfeeling thence, strong therefore : Strength by stress
 magne— " Of Strength comes of that forehead confident,
 physical " Those widened eyes expecting heart's content,
 force " A calm as out of just-quelled noise ; nor swerves
 " For doubt, the ample cheek in gracious curves
 " Abutting on the upthrust nether lip :
 " He wills, how should he doubt then? Ages slip : 140
 " Was it Sordello pried into the work
 " So far accomplished, and discovered lurk
 " A company amid the other clans,
 " Only distinct in priests for castellans
 " And popes for suzerains (their rule confessed
 " Its rule, their interest its interest,
 " Living for sake of living—there an end,—
 " Wrapt in itself, no energy to spend
 " In making adversaries or allies)—
 " Dived you into its capabilities 150
 " And dared create, out of that sect, a soul
 " Should turn a multitude, already whole,
 " Into its body ? Speak plainer ! Is't so sure
 " God's church lives, by a King's investiture ¹ ?
 " Look to last step ! A staggering—a shock—
 " What's mere sand is demolished, while the rock

135. that] a. 136. Those] Two.

135-136. The change from the indefinite to the definite in the revised text gives point to the fact that Browning on his visit to Russia in 1834 had stayed at Aix, where in the council chamber of the Rathaus he had seen the oldest, most famous portrait of Charlemagne. [Griffin, *Life*, p. 62.] Browning evidently recalled the picture.

150. you] he. 153. Into its body]. To some account. 156. mere] omit. is] shall be.

when a mind great enough to put a spiritual ideal before him is produced. Such an ideal will have some outward form or symbolic expression—a flag or national emblem (*fleur de lys*) around which men gather, the symbol becoming sacred and mankind lifted thereby. "The flower" here may be a legend or possibly it may refer to the *fleur de lys* which was given to Charlemagne by the Pope as a banner. "The rout who checked" suggests the story of Clovis' conversion.

¹ The Guelf-Ghibelline struggle had its rise in the quarrel over the Imperial right of investiture of the Bishops and clergy. [See *Intro.* § 13.]

"Endures : a column of black fiery dust
 "Blots heaven—that help was prematurely thrust
 "Aside, perchance !—but air clears, nought's erased
 "Of the true outline. Thus much being firm based 160
 "The other was a scaffold. See him stand
 "Buttressed upon his mattock, Hildebrand
 "Of the huge brain-mask welded ply o'er ply
 "As in a forge ; it buries either eye
 "White and extinct, that stupid brow ; teeth clenched,
 "The neck tight-corded, too, the chin deep-trenched,
 "As if a cloud enveloped him while fought
 "Under its shade, grim prizers, thought with thought
 "At dead-lock, agonizing he, until
 "The victor thought leap radiant up, and Will, 170
 "The slave with folded arms and drooping lids
 "They fought for, lean forth flame-like as it bids.
 "Call him no flower—a mandrake of the earth,
 "Thwarted and dwarfed and blasted in its birth,
 "Rather,—a fruit of suffering's excess,
 "Thence feeling, therefore stronger ; still by stress
 "Of Strength, work Knowledge ! Full three hundred
 years
 "Have men to wear away in smiles and tears
 "Between the two that nearly seemed to touch,
 "Observe you ! quit one workman and you clutch 180
 "Another, letting both their trains go by—
 "The actors-out of either's policy,
 "Heinrich, on this hand, Otho, Barbaross,
 "Carry the three Imperial crowns across,
 "Aix' Iron, Milan's Silver, and Rome's Gold ¹ —
 "While Alexander, Innocent uphold
 "On that, each Papal key—but, link on link,
 "Why is it neither chain betrays a chink ?
 "How coalesce the small and great ? Alack,
 "For one thrust forward, fifty such fall back ! 190

BOOK V

Hildebrand—
force and
spirit

158. that help was] woe, woe 'tis. 159. perchance] that step.
 168. shade] all. 173. Call him no flower] a root, the crippled
 mandrake, etc. 175. Rather] Be certain. 184. three] omit ; ...
 May carry. 187. each] the.

¹ There is some confusion here. The German Crown (Aix) was
 silver, the Lombard (Milan) was iron, because it was said to
 contain a nail from the True Cross given by Gregory to Theodelinde,
 Queen of the Lombards, and the Roman, gold.

- Book V " Do the popes coupled there help Gregory
 Steps in " Alone? Hark—from the hermit Peter's cry
 the vic- " At Claremont down to the first serf that says
 tory of " Friedrich's no liege of his while he delays
 the " Getting the Pope's curse off him! The Crusade—
 spiritual " Or trick of breeding Strength by other aid
 ideal " Than Strength is safe. Hark—from the wild harangue
 Crusades " Of Vimmercato,¹ to the carroch's clang
 " Yonder! The League—or trick of turning Strength
 The " Against Pernicious Strength, is safe at length. 200
 Papal " Yet hark—from Mantuan Albert making cease
 League " The fierce ones,² to Saint Francis preaching peace
 " Yonder! God's Truce—or trick to supersede
 " The very Use of Strength, is safe. Indeed
 God's " We trench upon the future. Who is found
 Truce " To take next step, next age—trail o'er the ground—
 " Shall I say, gourd-like?—not the flower's display
 " Nor the root's prowess, but the plenteous way
 " O' the plant—produced by joy and sorrow, whence
 " Unfeeling and yet feeling, stringest thence? 210
 The next " Knowledge by stress of merely Knowledge? No—
 step? " E'en were Sordello ready to forego
 " His life for this, 'twere overleaping work

191. The reading of the 1st edition may have been suggested by the fact that before assuming the tiara himself Hildebrand had already nominated two Popes, Victor II. and Alexander II.

191-2 reads: The couple there alone help Gregory. Hark from the Hermit Peter's thin sad cry. 193. down] yonder, omit "first." 204. very] omit . . .; insert "at all" after strength. 205. is] shall. 206. to take] omit; insert "plenteous" after trail. 207-9 reads: Vine like producing joy and sorrow whence, unfeeling, etc. 211. Merely] omit; insert "is it" after knowledge. 213. life] work.

¹ At the end of Tom. viii. of Muratori (*Ital. Rev. Script.*), from which Browning drew much of his data, there is a poem entitled "Stephenardi de Vicomercato ordinis prædicatorum de gestis in civitate Mediolani sub Othone Vicecomite Archiepiscopo Mediolanensi." This is probably the reference here.

² In Ferrara the spilling of blood was arrested for a brief space in 1207, by the voice of one Fra Alberto da Mantua preaching peace from the pulpit of the Duomo, which filled the people with such enthusiasm of brotherly kindness that forty-five families divided by blood-feuds fell upon each others' necks and made peace (Noyes, *Ferrara*, Mediæv. Town Series, p. 21). In 1233 a more famous reconciliation under the influence of Fra Giovanni da Vicenza took place.

" Some one has first to do, howe'er it irk,
 " Nor stray a foot's breadth from the beaten road.
 " Who means to help must still support the load
 " Hildebrand lifted—' why hast Thou,' he groaned,
 " ' Imposed on me a burthen, Paul had moaned,
 " ' And Moses dropped beneath ? ' Much done—and
 yet
 " Doubtless that grandest task God ever set 220
 " On man, left much to do : at his arm's wrench,
 " Charlemagne's scaffold fell ; but pillars blench
 " Merely start back again—perchance have been
 " Taken for buttresses : crash every screen,
 " Hammer the tenons ¹ better, and engage
 " A gang about your work, for the next age
 " Or two, of Knowledge, part by Strength and part
 " By Knowledge ! Then, indeed, perchance may start
 " Sordello on his race—would time divulge
 " Such secrets ! If one step's awry, one bulge 230
 " Calls for correction by a step we thought
 " Got over long since, why, till that is wrought,
 " No progress ! And the scaffold in its turn
 " Becomes, its service o'er, a thing to spurn.
 " Meanwhile, if your half-dozen years of life
 " In store dispose you to forego the strife,
 " Who takes exception ? Only bear in mind
 " Ferrara's reached, Goito's left behind :
 " As you then were, as half yourself, desist !
 " —The warrior-part of you may, an it list, 240
 " Finding real faulchions difficult to poise,
 " Fling them afar and taste the cream of joys

Is Sor-
dello to
be its
instru-
ment ?

215 reads: No ends in sight yet of that second road. 218.
on me a burthen] My God, a thing. 219. dropped] failed.

222. That is, the scaffold erected by Charlemagne was pulled
down by Hildebrand three centuries later. This whole passage
has been so re-written in the 2nd edition that the differences
are too numerous to notice, though in substance it remains the
same.

230. Would time, etc.] But who'll divulge time's secrets ?
236. in store] longer . . .

¹ The end of a piece of timber cut so as to leave a third of the
thickness forms a tenon, and the piece of timber which is joined
to it has a mortice or slot cut through it to receive the tenon ;
the two are then wedged or pinned with wooden pins (*Encyclo.*
Brit.). Cf. iv. 559.

BOOK V " By wielding such in fancy,—what is bard
 Work, not " Of you may spurn the vehicle that marred
 dreaming, " Elys so much, and in free fancy glut
 must be " His sense, yet write no verses—you have but
 his " To please yourself for law, and once could please
 method " What once appeared yourself, by dreaming these
 " Rather than doing these, in days gone by.
 " But all is changed the moment you descry 250
 " Mankind as half yourself,—then, fancy's trade
 " Ends once and always : how many half evade
 " The other half ? men are found half of you.
 " Out of a thousand helps, just one or two
 " Can be accomplished presently : but flinch
 " From these (as from the faulchion, raised an inch,
 " Elys, described a couplet) and make proof
 " Of fancy,—then, while one half lolls aloof
 " I' the vines, completing Rome to the tip-top—
 " See if, for that, your other half will stop 260
 The " A tear, begin a smile ! The rabble's woes,
 rabble's " Ludicrous in their patience as they chose
 woes " To sit about their town and quietly
 " Be slaughtered,—the poor reckless soldiery,
 " With their ignoble rhymes on Richard, how
 " ' Polt-foot,' sang they, ' was in a pitfall now,'
 " Cheering each other from the engine-mounts,—
 " That crippled spawling idiot who recounts
 " How, lopped of limbs, he lay, stupid as stone,
 " Till the pains crept from out him one by one, 270
 " And wriggles round the archers on his head
 " To earn a morsel of their chestnut bread,—
 " And Cino,¹ always in the self-same place
 " Weeping ; beside that other wretch's case,
 " Eyepits to ear, one gangrene since he plied
 " The engine in his coat of raw sheep's hide
 " A double watch in the noon sun ; and see
 " Lucchino, beauty, with the favours free,

246. yet write no] on her free. 249. in days, etc.] now fancy's trade. 250. is ended.

251-253 reads

" Now fancy's trade
 Is ended, mind, nor one half may evade
 The other half : our friends are half of you."

¹ Bk. iv. 91 ff.

" Trim hacqueton, spruce beard and scented hair,
 " Campaigning it for the first time—cut there 280
 " In two already, boy enough to crawl
 " For latter orpine round the southern wall,
 " Tomà, where Richard's kept, because that whore
 " Marfisa, the fool never saw before,
 " Sickened for flowers this wearisomest siege :
 " And Tiso's wife ¹—men liked their pretty liege,
 " Cared for her least of whims once,—Berta wed,
 " A twelvemonth gone, and, now poor Tiso's dead,
 " Delivering herself of his first child
 " On that chance heap of wet filth, reconciled 290
 " To fifty gazers !"—(Here a wind below
 Made moody music augural of woe
 From the pine barrier)—" What if, now the scene
 " Draws to a close, yourself have really been
 " —You, plucking purples in Goito's moss
 " Like edges of a trabea (not to cross
 " Your consul-humour) or dry aloe-shafts
 " For fasces, at Ferrara—he, fate wafts,
 " This very age, her whole inheritance
 " Of opportunities ? Yet you advance 300
 " Upon the last ! Since talking is your trade,
 " There's Salinguerra left you to persuade :
 " Fail ! then "—

" No—no—which latest chance secure ! " The Interview

Leaped up and cried Sordello : " this made sure,
 " The past were yet redeemable ; its work
 " Was—help the Guelfs, whom I, howe'er it irk,

279. spruce beard and] and sprucely. 294. close] shutting ;
 omit if . . . 297. consul-humour] consul-feeling. 298. For
 fasces] omit, insert Here fate] fortune. 299. whole] best. 303.
 Fail] And. 304. Leaped] Leapt.

¹ Bk. iii. 302 ; iv. 615. Verri gives a tree of the Camposampieri family, but does not mention Berta as his wife. Further on, however, in discussing the marriage of Palma Novella with Alberto da Baone, he quotes from a deed in which Tisolino was chosen to partition Alberto's inheritance among the family, by his widow, Bertalina, and others. The opening words may have suggested the name to Browning. Tisolino da Camposampiero fu eletto dalla signora Bertalina per Sophia ed Elica sue figlie, e da Jacobino, etc. . . . ad assegnare le parti de beni del quand. Albertino da Baone. The passage is of further interest, as one of the interested parties was Taurello, on behalf of " Arvero suo figlio e per la signora India sua moglie."

BOOK V "Thus help!" He shook the foolish aloe-haulm
 Out of his doublet, paused, proceeded calm
 To the appointed presence. The large head
 Turned on its socket; "And your spokesman," said 310
 The large voice, "is Elcorte's happy sprout?
 "Few such"—(so finishing a speech no doubt
 Addressed to Palma, silent at his side)
 "—My sober councils have diversified.
 "Elcorte's son! good: forward as you may,
 "Our lady's minstrel with so much to say!"
 The hesitating sunset floated back,
 Rosily traversed in the wonted track

The Chamber The chamber, from the lattice o'er the girth
 Of pines, to the huge eagle blacked in earth 320
 Opposite,—outlined sudden, spur to crest,
 That solid Salinguerra, and caressed
 Palma's contour: 'twas day looped back night's pall;
 Sordello had a chance left spite of all.

And much he made of the convincing speech
 Meant to compensate for the past and reach
 Through his youth's daybreak of unprofit, quite
 To his noon's labour, so proceed till night
 Leisurely! The great argument to bind
 Taurello with the Guelf Cause, body and mind, 330
 —Came the consummate rhetoric to that?
 Yet most Sordello's argument dropped flat
 Through his accustomed fault of breaking yoke,
 Disjoining him who felt from him who spoke.
 Was't not a touching incident—so prompt
 A rendering the world its just accmpt,

Why his speech failed Once proved its debtor? Who'd suppose, before
 This proof, that he, Goito's god of yore,
 At duty's instance could demean himself
 So memorably, dwindle to a Guelf? 340
 Be sure, in such delicious flattery steeped,
 His inmost self at the out-portion peeped,
 Thus occupied; then stole a glance at those
 Appealed to, curious if her colour rose
 Or his lip moved, while he discreetly urged
 The need of Lombardy becoming purged
 At soonest of her barons; the poor part

315. good] but. 318. the wonted] a single. 329. Leisurely]
 at leisure. Great argument] contrivances. 330. Guelf] omitted.

Abandoned thus, missing the blood at heart
 And spirit in brain, unseasonably off
 Elsewhere ! But, though his speech was worthy scoff,
 Good-humoured Salinguerra, famed for tact 351
 And tongue, who, careless of his phrase, ne'er lacked
 The right phrase, and harangued Honorius dumb
 At his accession,¹—looked as all fell plumb
 To purpose and himself found interest
 In every point his new instructor pressed
 —Left playing with the rescript's white wax seal
 To scrutinize Sordello head and heel.
 He means to yield assent sure ? No, alas !
 All he replied was, " What, it comes to pass 360
 " That poesy, sooner than politics,
 " Makes fade young hair ? " To think such speech
 could fix
 Taurello !

Taur-
 ello's
 satire

Then a flash of bitter truth :
 So fantasies could break and fritter youth
 That he had long ago lost earnestness,
 Lost will to work, lost power to even express
 The need of working ! Earth was turned a grave :
 No more occasions now, though he should crave
 Just one, in right of superhuman toil,
 To do what was undone, repair such spoil, 370
 Alter the past—nothing would give the chance !
 Not that he was to die ; he saw askance
 Protract the ignominious years beyond
 To dream in—time to hope and time despond,
 Remember and forget, be sad, rejoice
 As saved a trouble ; he might, at his choice,
 One way or other, idle life out, drop
 No few smooth verses by the way—for prop,

Sordello
 sees his
 failure

352. And tongue] That way.

359. reads: Then means he . . . yes, assent sure ? Well ?
 Alas

He said no more than,

363. of bitter] He knew the truth. 366. Even] omitted.
 367. reads, " Even the need of working ! " Ere the grave. 369.
 Just one] one such. 371. nothing would] nought brings
 again. 376. he might at] suited to.

¹ There is no mention of this as an historical fact in the
 authorities; it is probably imaginary.

BOOK V A thyrsus, these sad people, all the same,
Should pick up, and set store by,—far from blame, 380
Plant o'er his hearse, convinced his better part
Survived him.¹ "Rather tear men out the heart
"O' the truth!"—Sordello muttered, and renewed
His propositions for the Multitude.

But Salinguerra, who at this attack
Had thrown great breast and ruffling corslet back
To hear the better, smilingly resumed
His task; beneath, the carroch's warning boomed;
He must decide with Tito; courteously
He turned then, even seeming to agree 390

Taurello's scornful
acqui-
escence With his admonisher—"Assist the Pope,
"Extend Guelf domination, fill the scope
"O' the Church, thus based on All, by All, for All—
"Change Secular to Evangelical"—

Echoing his very sentence: all seemed lost,
When suddenly he looked up, laughingly almost,
To Palma: "This opinion of your friend's—
"For instance, would it answer Palma's ends?
"Best, were it not, turn Guelf, submit our Strength"—
(Here he drew out his baldric to its length) 400

—"To the Pope's knowledge—let our captive slip,
"Wide to the walls throw ope our gates, equip
"Azzo with . . . what I hold here! Who'll subscribe
"To a trite censure of the minstrel tribe
"Henceforward? or pronounce, as Heinrich used,
" 'Spear-heads for battle, burr-heads for the joust!'
"—When Constance, for his couplets, would promote
"Alcamo, from a parti-coloured coat,
"To holding her lord's stirrup in the wars.
"Not that I see where couplet-making jars 410
"With common sense: at Mantua I had borne
"This chanted, better than their most forlorn

379. all] should. 380. after by insert so far and so. 385. at
this] the last. 386. Had . . . end] Threw himself in his.
388. His] some. 392. Guelf] his. 396. up] omitted. 400. his]
the . . . 401. our captive] Richard. 402. our] your. 403.
What I hold here] but no matter. 412. better] easier.

¹ The thyrsus, a stick wrapped round with ivy, was carried
as an emblem of devotion by the followers of Bacchus—this
would be the fate of Sordello's Songs—of no use or value, but just
a memento—and all would think this was his best!

"Of bull-baits,—that's indisputable!"

Book V

Brave!

Whom vanity nigh slew, contempt shall save!
All's at an end: a Troubadour suppose
Mankind will class him with their friends or foes?
A puny uncouth ailing vassal think
The world and him bound in some special link?
Abrupt the visionary tether burst.

Rouses
Sordello
at last

What were rewarded here, or what amerced
If a poor drudge, solicitous to dream
Deservingly, got tangled by his theme
So far as to conceit the knack or gift,
Or whatsoe'er it be, of verse, might lift
The globe, a lever like the hand and head
Of—"Men of Action," as the Jongleurs said,
—"The Great Men," in the people's dialect¹?

420

And not a moment did this scorn affect
Sordello: scorn the poet? They, for once,
Asking "what was," obtained a full response.
Bid Naddo think at Mantua—he had but

430

To look into his promptuary, put
Finger on a set thought in a set speech:
But was Sordello fitted thus for each
Conjecture? Nowise; since within his soul,
Perception brooded unexpressed and whole.
A healthy spirit like a healthy frame
Craves aliment in plenty—all the same,
Changes, assimilates its aliment.

Sordello's
know-
ledge a
real thing
and novel
withal

413. bull-baits] bull-fights. 418. bound: special] omit
special. 433. Finger] His hand. 435. Conjecture] conjuncture.
438. all] and

¹ This paragraph is Sordello's interpretation of Salinguerra's opinion of him. What Taurello really thinks, but has not said—the real meaning of his sarcasm. So your opinion is, says Sordello to himself as he regards Taurello, that I am a mere Troubadour too insignificant for real men such as yourself even to class among friends or foes? a puny vassal ridiculous enough to think he is somebody of importance? That it is a matter of utter indifference one way or the other that I conceive my power of song a real power to lift men? You "men of action," "great men in the people's dialect," are the true force in the world, are you? Well, we will see. And then Sordello proceeds to prove that, as thinker, he is master and Taurello man. The visionary tether, the land of make-believe in which Sordello lived, burst, and what he truly thinks comes forth at last.

Book V Perceived Sordello, on a truth intent ? 440
 Next day no formularies more you saw
 Than figs or olives in a sated maw.
 'Tis Knowledge, whither such perceptions tend ;
 They lose themselves in that, means to an end,
 The many old producing some one new,
 A last unlike the first. If lies are true,
 The Caliph's wheel-work man of brass receives
 A meal, munched millet grains and lettuce leaves
 Together in his stomach rattle loose ;
 You find them perfect next day to produce : 450
 But ne'er expect the man, on strength of that,
 Can roll an iron camel-collar flat
 Like Haroun's self ! I tell you, what was stored
 Bit by bit through Sordello's life, outpoured
 That eve, was, for that age, a novel thing :
 And round those three the People formed a ring,
 Of visionary judges whose award
 He recognised in full—faces that barred
 Henceforth return to the old careless life,
 In whose great presence, therefore, his first strife 460
 For their sake must not be ignobly fought ;
 All these, for once, approved of him, he thought,
 Suspended their own vengeance, chose await
 The issue of this strife to reinstate
 Them in the right of taking it—in fact
 He must be proved king ere they could exact
 Vengeance for such king's defalcation. Last,
 A reason why the phrases flowed so fast
 Was in his quite forgetting for a time
 Himself in his amazement that the rhyme 470
 Disguised the royalty so much : he there—
 And Salinguerra yet all-unaware
 Who was the lord, who liegeman !

He for-
 gets him-
 self at
 last

“ Thus I lay
 “ On thine my spirit and compel obey

447. Wheelwork] Haroun. 448. munched] ay. 454. Bit by
 bit] parcel by parcel. Sordello's] his. 457-462] omitted. 466.
 King] their lord. 467. Vengeance] amends

471-3. reads:

“ He there
 They full face to him—and yet unaware
 Who was the king and who . . . But if I lay. . .

" His lord,—my liegeman,—impotent to build
 " Another Rome, but hardly so unskilled
 " In what such builder should have been, as brook
 " One shame beyond the charge that I forsook
 " His function ! Free me from that shame, I bend
 " A brow before, suppose new years to spend,— 480
 " Allow each chance, nor fruitlessly, recur—
 " Measure thee with the Minstrel, then, demur
 " At any crowd he claims ! That I must cede
 " Shamed now, my right to my especial meed—
 " Confess thee fitter help the world than I
 " Ordained its champion from eternity,
 " Is much : but to behold thee scorn the post
 " I quit in thy behalf—to hear thee boast
 " What makes my own despair ! " And while he rung
 The changes on this theme, the roof up-sprung, 490
 The sad walls of the presence-chamber died
 Into the distance, or embowering vied
 With far-away Goito's vine-frontier ;
 And crowds of faces—(only keeping clear
 The rose-light in the midst, his vantage-ground
 To fight their battle from)—deep clustered round
 Sordello, with good wishes no mere breath,
 Kind prayers for him no vapour, since, come death
 Come life, he was fresh sinewed every joint,
 Each bone new-marrowed as whom gods anoint 500
 Though mortal to their rescue. Now let sprawl
 The snaky volumes hither ! Is Typhon all
 For Hercules to trample—good report
 From Salinguerra only to extort ¹ ?

Book V
 His plea

The poet
 earth's
 essential
 king

475. my liegeman] Taurello ? 479. Free me from] Set me free.
 483. crowd] crown. 483. Shamed now] As 'tis. 485. thee] you.
 488-9. reads] as aught to boast—unless you help the world !

¹ Now that for once Sordello is aroused and in earnest he feels the mere task of convincing Taurello insufficient—'tis but a paltry incident in the greater task of dealing with mankind in the mass. His strength comes back—"he knew a sometime deed again." He speaks for man and to man as a prophet, pleading the cause of the deeper powers of man against the tyranny of mere physical oppression. In this he is far before his age. It is the highest point he touches—

" The high that proved too high, the heroic for earth too hard
 The passion that left the ground to lose itself in the sky,
 Are music sent up to God by the lover and the bard."

BOOK V "So was I" (closed he his inculcating
 A poet must be earth's essential king)
 "So was I, royal so, and if I fail,
 "'Tis not the royalty, ye witness quail,
 "But one deposed who, caring not exert
 "Its proper essence, trifled malapert 510
 "With accidents instead—good things assigned
 His "As heralds of a better thing behind—
 royalty, "And, worthy through display of these, put forth
 "Never the inmost all-surpassing worth
 "That constitutes him king precisely since
 "As yet no other spirit may evince
 "Its like : the power he took most pride to test,
 "Whereby all forms of life had been professed
 "At pleasure, forms already on the earth,
 "Was but a means to power beyond, whose birth 520
 "Should, in its novelty, be kingship's proof.
 "Now, whether he came near or kept aloof
 "The several forms he longed to imitate
 "Not there the kingship lay, he sees too late.¹
 "Those forms, unalterable first as last,
 "Proved him her copier, not the protoplast
 "Of nature : what would come of being free,
 "By action to exhibit tree for tree,
 "Bird, beast, for beast and bird, or prove earth bore
 "One veritable man or woman more ? 530
 "Means to an end, such proofs are : what the end ?
 "Let essence, whatsoe'er it be, extend—
 "Never contract. Already you include
 "The multitude ; then let the multitude
 "Include yourself ; and the result were new :
 "Themselves before, the multitude turn you.

512. As heralds] The herald. 516. spirit] creature. 520. be-
 yond whose] whose novel. 523-524] omitted. 530. one] a. 532.
 Let] Your. 535. were] is.

¹ His first point is that though he has hitherto only used his power for trifling purposes, to amuse the crowd to whom he sang, and to get praise thereby, yet its deeper possibilities of influence still remain intact. His next point is that his illustrative and imitative art as a poet, which he had mistaken for the essence of royalty, he now sees to be mere accessories which are to be used not as ends in themselves, but as means to simplify the driving home of the truths that man needed.

" This were to live and move and have, in them, Book V
 " Your being, and secure a diadem
 " You should transmit (because no cycle yearns
 " Beyond itself, but on itself returns) 540
 " When, the full sphere in wane, the world o'erlaid
 " Long since with you, shall have in turn obeyed
 " Some orb still prouder, some displayer, still
 " More potent than the last, of human will,
 " And some new king depose the old.¹ Of such
 " Am I—whom pride of this elates too much ?
 " Safe, rather say, 'mid troops of peers again ;
 " I, with my words, hailed brother of the train
 " Deeds once sufficed : for, let the world roll back, The dawn
 " Who fails, through deeds howe'er diverse, retrack 550 of Song
 " My purpose still, my task ² ? A teeming crust—
 " Air, flame, earth, wave at conflict ! Then, needs must
 " Emerge some Calm embodied, these refer
 " The brawl to—yellow-bearded Jupiter ?
 " No ! Saturn ; some existence like a pact
 " And protest against Chaos, some first fact
 " I' the faint of time. My deep of life, I know
 " Is unavailing e'en to poorly show " . . .
 (For here the Chief immeasurably yawned)
 . . . " Deeds in their due gradation till Song dawned—
 " The fullest effluence of the finest mind, 561
 " All in degree, no way diverse in kind

539. You should] That's to. 552. Then] see! 554. The
 brawl to] Saturn—no. 555. No Saturn] the brawl to.

¹ The end for which the poet strives must be to make the people see and value truth even as the poet does himself. So that the multitude turn poet. This can only be done by the poet's first entering into their point of view and transfiguring their simple truths with the magic of his own personality. Then, work is done, man takes a step forward until some new and greater force arises to urge them forward once again.

² No matter how far you go back in history, Sordello claims that his dictum that the thinker, not the mere man of action, is the true power, holds good. In savage life the real power is not the strongest man in the tribe, but the witch-doctor who stands for the thinking power, whose influence is brain, not muscle. Even in the Roman mythology in its rudest form, the idea underlying the feast of the Saturnalia which was kept in memory of the supposed golden age of peace existing under the rule of Saturn, implies the idea of a thinking force who brought calm out of chaos by justice.

- Book V " From minds about it, minds which, more or less,
 " Lofty or low, move seeking to impress
 " Themselves on somewhat ; but one mind has climbed
 " Step after step, by just ascent sublimed.
 " Thought is the soul of act, and, stage by stage,
 " Soul is from body still to disengage
 " As tending to a freedom which rejects
 " Such help and incorporeally affects 570
 " The world, producing deeds but not by deeds,
 Produces " Swaying, in others, frames itself exceeds,
 acts by " Assigning them the simpler tasks it used
 thought " To patiently perform till Song produced
 only " Acts, by thoughts only, for the mind : divest
 " Mind of e'en Thought, and, lo, God's unexpressed
 " Will draws above us ¹ ! All then is to win
 " Save that. How much for me, then ? where begin
 " My work ? About me, faces ! and they flock,
 " The earnest faces. What shall I unlock 580
 " By song ? behold me prompt, whate'er it be,
 " To minister : how much can mortals see
 The " Of Life ? No more than so ? I take the task
 scope of " And marshal you Life's elemental masque,
 Song " Show Men, on evil or on good lay stress,
 " This light, this shade make prominent, suppress
 " All ordinary hues that softening blend
 " Such natures with the level. Apprehend
 " Which sinner is, which saint, if I allot
 " Hell, Purgatory, Heaven, a blaze or blot, 590

563. Minds] those. 564. Move seeking to] in moving seek.
 577. draws] dawns. All then is to] But so much to. 578 reads—
 Ere that ! A lesser round of steps within. The last.

583. No more than so] No more ? I covet the first task.
 585. Show] Of. 589-590 reads—

" Which evil is which good if I allot
 Your Hell, the Purgatory, Heaven ye wot."

¹ The tendency of man's development, says Browning, is the elimination of the physical and its replacement by mental power. Gunpowder (the result of thought), said Carlyle, makes all men equally tall. Machinery, again (the result of thought), replaces human labour. In the earlier stages the Bard was the only thinker and the Poet is the highest impression of the same truth. Thought is the apex of human power ; pure mind, independent of the medium of brain, is God.

" To those you doubt concerning ! I enwomb
 " Some wretched Friedrich with his red-hot tomb ¹ ;
 " Some dubious spirit, Lombard Agilulph ²
 " With the black chastening river I engulph !
 " Some unapproached Matilda I enshrine
 " With languors of the planet of decline—
 " These, fail to recognize, to arbitrate
 " Between henceforth, to rightly estimate
 " Thus marshalled in the masque ! Myself, the while,
 " As one of you, am witness, shrink or smile 600
 " At my own showing ! Next age—what's to do ?
 " The men and women stationed hitherto
 " Will I unstation, good and bad, conduct
 " Each nature to its farthest, or obstruct
 " At soonest, in the world : light, thwarted, breaks
 " A limpid purity to rainbow flakes,
 " Or shadow, massed, freezes to gloom : behold
 " How such, with fit assistance to unfold,
 " Or obstacles to crush them, disengage
 " Their forms, love, hate, hope, fear, peace make, war
 wage, 610
 " In presence of you all ! Myself, implied
 " Superior now, as, by the platforms' side,
 " I bade them do and suffer,—would last content
 " The world . . . no—that's too far ! I circumvent
 " A few, my masque contented, and to these
 " Offer unveil the last of mysteries—

BOOK V
 The
 judge of
 good and
 evil

and of
 character

607. massed] helped. 613. I bade] bidding them . . . to
 content. 614. too far] I wait not. 615. my masque] it has.

¹ According to Dante, *Hell*, Canto x., this was the doom of the
 "Epicureans," i.e. those who within the Church went back to
 the teaching of the heathen philosophers. Frederic II. was
 among them. A similar idea, but of much earlier date, is told by
 a monkish chronicler of Charles Martel, the grandfather of Charle-
 magne, that in consequence of a dream his tomb was opened,
 "and lo! there issued forth a dragon and the tomb was found
 blackened within, as with fire." The Legend arose out of
 monkish hatred on account of his alienation of Church lands.
 See Kitchen, *Hist. of France*, vol. i. p. 116, note.

² Agilulf was King of the Lombards who overran Italy in the
 sixth century. He was the second husband of their Queen
 Theodelinda, mainly through whose efforts the Lombards aban-
 doned Arianism and became reconciled to Rome. "Dubious"
 refers probably to his faith. A converted Arian might be justly
 so regarded.

BOOK V " Man's inmost life shall have yet freer play :
 and " Once more I cast external things away,
 human " And natures composite, so decompose
 motives " That . . . But enough ! Why fancy how I rose ¹ 620
 " And how have you advanced ! since evermore
 " Yourself effect what I was fain before
 " Effect, what I supplied yourselves suggest,
 " What I leave bare yourselves can now invest,
 " How we attain to talk as brothers talk,
 " In half-words, call things by half-names, no balk
 " From discontinuing old aids. To-day
 " Takes in account the work of Yesterday :
 " Has not the world a Past now, its adept
 " Consults ere he dispense with or accept 630
 " New aids ? a single touch more may enhance,
 " A touch less turn to insignificance
 " Those structures' symmetry the past has strewed
 " The world with, once so bare. Leave the mere rude
 " Explicit details ! 'tis but brother's speech
 " We need, speech where an accent's change gives each
 " The other's soul—no speech to understand
 " By former audience : need was then to expand,
 " Expatriate—hardly were we brothers ! true—
 " Nor I lament my small remove from you, 640
 " Nor reconstruct what stands already. Ends
 " Accomplished turn to means : my art intends
 " New structure from the ancient : as they changed
 " The spoils of every clime at Venice, ranged
 " The horned and snouted Libyan god, upright
 " As in his desert, by some simple bright
 " Clay cinerary pitcher—Thebes as Rome,
 " Athens as Byzant rifled, till their Dome
 " From earth's reputed consummations razed

The poet's
 art pro-
 gressive
 x

617. inmost] omitted ; (line begins) I boast. 619. varied] composite. 620. That . . . why he writes *Sordello* ! 621. how have you] or rather how you. 639. we] they. 640. small] less.

¹ I have here inserted the 1st edition reading, confining the reading of the revised edition to the notes. The reason of this is the anticlimax produced by the words " He writes *Sordello*," which ruins the whole speech and is only intelligible when we remember the outcry as to *Sordello*'s intelligibility which followed its publication. Browning sacrificed his art to his love of sarcasm and a desire to laugh at his critics when he rewrote this line,

" A seal, the all-transmuting Triad blazed
 " Above.¹ Ah, whose that fortune? Ne'ertheless
 " E'en he must stoop contented to express
 " No tithe of what's to say—the vehicle
 " Never sufficient: but his work is still
 " For faces like the faces that select
 " The single service I am bound effect,—
 " That bid me cast aside such fancies, bow
 " Taurello to the Guelf cause, disallow
 " The Kaiser's coming—which with heart, soul, strength,
 " I labour for, this eve, who feel at length 660
 " My past career's outrageous vanity,
 " And would, as its amends, die, even die
 " Now I first estimate the boon of life,
 " If death might win compliance—sure, this strife
 " Is right for once—the People my support."

My poor Sordello! what may we extort
 By this, I wonder? Palma's lighted eyes
 Turned to Taurello who, long past surprise,
 Began, " You love him—what you'd say at large
 " Let me say briefly.² First, your father's charge 670
 " To me, his friend, peruse: I guessed indeed
 " You were no stranger to the course decreed.
 " He bids me leave his children to the saints:
 " As for a certain project, he acquaints
 " The Pope with that, and offers him the best
 " Of your possessions to permit the rest
 " Go peaceably—to Ecelin, a stripe

Taurello
 to Palma

657 reads—Nor murmur, bid me, still as poet, bow.. 662. its] vain. 664. win compliance] bow Taurello. 665. right for once] the last strife. 668. long] as. 670. Let] If. 673. He bids me] Us both: I.

¹ See *Introd.* to Bk. v.

² Though the drift and substance of Sordello's speech is quite lost upon Taurello, he grasps at once in all its bearings the one practical point that emerges from it, namely, that Palma is in love with him. From this he deduces; he is a Guelf, she will yield her will to his, ergo, the cause of Romano with Palma for the centrepiece is lost. Then the idea comes to him why, must it be Romano? Why not found a party of his own? From this comes the notion of marrying Palma and Sordello and, so to speak, running the old firm under a new name. The one obstruction is Sordello's will and Guelf principles, to overcome which he plays his last trump card and flings the badge across his neck, making him thereby Imperial Vicar and Romano's head.

Book V " Of soil the cursed Vicentines will gripe,
 " —To Alberic, a patch the Trevisan
 " Clutches already ; extricate, who can, 680
 The crisis " Treville, Villarazzi, Puissolo,
 lost " Loria and Cartiglione !—all must go,
 " And with them go my hopes. 'Tis lost, then ! Lost
 " This eve, our crisis, and some pains it cost
 " Procuring ; thirty years—as good I'd spent
 " Like our admonisher ! But each his bent
 " Pursues : no question, one might live absurd
 " Oneself this while, by deed as he by word
 " Persisting to obtrude an influence where
 " 'Tis made account of, much as . . . nay, you fare 690
 " With twice the fortune, youngster !—I submit,
 " Happy to parallel my waste of wit
 " With the renowned Sordello's : you decide
 " A course for me. Romano may abide
 " Romano,—Bacchus ! After all, what dearth
 " Of Ecelins and Alberics on earth ?
 " Say there's a prize in prospect, must disgrace
 " Betide competitors, unless they style
 " Themselves Romano ? Were it worth my while
 No, why " To try my own luck ¹ ! But an obscure place 700
 not start " Suits me—there wants a youth to bustle, stalk
 a new " And attitudinize—some fight, more talk,
 party ? " Most flaunting badges—how, I might make clear
 " Since Friedrich's very purposes lie here
 " —Here, pity they are like to lie ! For me,
 " With station fixed unceremoniously
 " Long since, small use contesting ; I am but
 " The liegeman—you are born the lieges : shut
 " That gentle mouth now ! or resume your kin
 " In your sweet self ; were Palma Ecelin 710
 " For me to work with ! Could that neck endure
 " This bauble for a cumbrous garniture,
 " She should . . . or might one bear it for her ? Stay—

695. After all what] Who'd suppose the. 697. prize] thing.
 699. were it . . . luck] omitted. 703. how, I might] 'twere not
 hard. 706. With] Whose. 711. to work with] and welcome.
 713. She] You.

¹ What's in a name ? thinks Taurello ; can I not pursue the
 same ends under some other ægis than Romano, either found a
 party of my own or—marry these two and fight under them ?

"I have not been so flattered many a day
 "As by your pale friend—Bacchus! The least help
 "Would lick the hind's fawn to a lion's whelp:
 "His neck is broad enough—a ready tongue
 "Beside: too writhled¹—but, the main thing, young—
 "I could . . . why, look ye!"

And the badge was thrown

Across Sordello's neck: "This badge alone	720	Throws
"Makes you Romano's Head—becomes superb		the
"On your bare neck, which would, on mine, disturb		badge
"The pauldron," said Taurello. A mad act,		upon
Nor even dreamed about before—in fact,		Sordello
Not when his sportive arm rose for the nonce—		
But he had dallied overmuch, this once,		
With power: the thing was done, and he, aware		
The thing was done, proceeded to declare—		
(So like a nature made to serve, excel		
In serving, only feel by service well!)	730	
—That he would make Sordello that and more.		
"As good a scheme as any. What's to pore		
"At in my face?" he asked—"ponder instead		
"This piece of news; you are Romano's Head!		
"One cannot slacken pace so near the goal,		
"Suffer my Azzo to escape heart-whole		
"This time! For you there's Palma to espouse—		
"For me, one crowning trouble ere I house		
"Like my compeer."		

On which ensued a strange

And solemn visitation; there came change	740	The
O'er every one of them; each looked on each:		recognition
Up in the midst a truth grew, with outspeech.		
And when the giddiness sank and the haze		
Subsided, they were sitting, no amaze,		
Sordello with the baldric on, his sire		
Silent, though his proportions seemed aspire		
Momently; and, interpreting the thrill,—		
Night at its ebb,—Palma was found there still		

721. becomes superb] the Lombard's curb. 722. bare] omit: turns on, etc. 731. Sordello that] him all he said and. 740. there came] mighty. 748. was] you.

¹ Wrinkled. "Her writhled skin as rough as maple rind."—Spenser.

- Book V Relating somewhat Adelaide confessed
 A year ago, while dying on her breast,— 750
 Of a contrivance, that Vicenza night
 Palma's When Ecelin had birth. " Their convoy's flight,
 story " Cut off a moment, coiled inside the flame
 " That wallowed like a dragon at his game
 " The toppling city through—San Biagio rocks ¹ !
 " And wounded lies in her delicious locks
 " Retrude, the frail mother, on her face,
 " None of her wasted, just in one embrace
 " Covering her child : when, as they lifted her,
 " Cleaving the tumult, mighty, mightier 760
 " And mightiest Taurello's cry outbroke,
 " Leapt like a tongue of fire that cleaves the smoke,
 " Midmost to cheer his Mantuans onward—drown
 " His colleague Ecelin's clamour, up and down
 " The disarray : failed Adelaide see then
 " Who was the natural chief, the man of men ?
 Adelaide's " Outstripping time, her infant there burst swathe,
 vision " Stood up with eyes haggard beyond the scathe
 " From wandering after his heritage
 " Lost once and lost for aye : and why that rage, 770
 " That deprecating glance ? A new shape leant
 " On a familiar shape—gloatingly bent
 " O'er his discomfiture ; 'mid wreaths it wore,
 " Still one outflamed the rest—her child's before
 " 'Twas Salinguerra's for his child ² : scorn, hate,
 " Rage now might startle her when all too late !
 " Then was the moment !—rival's foot had spurned

752. When] Her. 767. infant there] Ecelin. 770. and why that rage] what could engage. 776. reads—" Rage, startled her from Ecelin, too late ! "

¹ The old Church of San Biagio is still to be seen at Vicenza (it is now a school) ; it is close to the Porta di Pusterla, the northern gate of the city.

² This strange vision of Adelaide's may have been suggested to Browning by a passage in Pietro Gerardo's *Vita de Ezzelino III.*, where he tells us that, wishing to know the destiny of her family, Adelaide betook herself to astronomy, and found that the stars threatened dire disaster to her children. " Ma volendo sapere quale avesse ad essere il fin loro, dottissima essendo, ricorse alla Astrologia, e trovo che le stelle molto minacciavano alla sua progenie : per il che mai piu non fu veduta ridere."—Gerardo, Lib. i. p. 9.

- " Never that House to earth else ! Sense returned— **Book V**
 " The act conceived, adventured and complete,
 " They bore away to an obscure retreat 780 **The**
 " Mother and child—Retrude's self not slain " **flight**
 (Nor even here Taurello moved) " though pain
 " Was fled ; and what assured them most 'twas fled,
 " All pain, was, if they rais'd the pale hushed head
 " 'Twould turn this way and that, waver awhile.
 " And only settle into its old smile—
 " (Graceful as the disquieted water-flag
 " Steadying itself, remarked they, in the quag
 " On either side their path)—when suffered look
 " Down on her child. They marched : no sign once 790
 shook
 " The company's close litter of crossed spears
 " Till, as they reached Goito, a few tears
 " Slipped in the sunset from her long black lash, **Retrude's**
 " And she was gone. So far the action rash ; **death**
 " No crime. They laid Retrude in the font, **and**
 Taurello's very gift, her child was wont **burial**
 " To sit beneath—constant as eve he came
 " To sit by its attendant girls the same
 " As one of them. For Palma, she would blend
 " With this magnific spirit to the end, 800
 " That ruled her first ; but scarcely has she dared
 " To disobey the Adelaide who scared **Why**
 " Her into vowing never to disclose **Palma**
 " A secret to her husband which so froze **kept**
 " His blood at half-recital, she contrived **silence**
 " To hide from him Taurello's infant lived,
 " Lest, by revealing that, himself should mar
 " Romano's fortunes. And, a crime so far,
 " Palma received that action : she was told
 " Of Salinguerra's nature, of his cold 810
 " Calm acquiescence in his lot ! But free
 " To impart the secret to Romano, she
 " Engaged to repossess Sordello of
 " His heritage, and hers, and that way doff
 " The mask, but after years, long years : while now,
 " Was not Romano's sign-mark on that brow ? "
 Across Taurello's heart his arms were locked :
 780. bore] stole. 790. on her child] downward. sign] insert
 " of life."

BOOK V And when he did speak 'twas as if he mocked
 Taurello The minstrel, " who had not to move," he said,
 and his " Nor stir—should fate defraud him of a shred 820
 son " Of his son's infancy ? much less his youth ! "
 (Laughingly all this)—" which to aid, in truth,
 " Himself, reserved on purpose, had not grown
 " Old, not too old —'twas best they kept alone
 " Till now, and never idly met till now ; "
 —Then, in the same breath, told Sordello how
 All intimations of this eve's ever
 Were lies, for Friedrich must advance to Trent,
 Thence to Verona, then to Rome, there stop,
 New Tumble the Church down, institute a-top 830
 schemes afoot at once The Alps a Prefecture of Lombardy :
 —" That's now !—no prophesying what may be
 " Anon, with a new monarch of the clime,
 " Native of Gesi, passing his youth's prime
 " At Naples.¹ Tito bids my choice decide
 " On whom . . . "
 " Embrace him, madam ! " Palma cried,
 Who through the laugh saw sweat-drops burst apace,
 And his lips blanching : he did not embrace
 Swears Sordello, but he laid Sordello's hand
 fealty to On his own eyes, mouth, forehead.²
 Sordello Understand, 840
 This while Sordello was becoming flushed
 Out of his whiteness ; thoughts rushed, fancies rushed ;
 He pressed his hand upon his head and signed
 Both should forbear him. " Nay, the best's behind ! "
 Taurello laughed—not quite with the same laugh :
 " The truth is, thus we scatter, ay, like chaff
 " These Guelfs, a despicable monk recoils
 " From : nor expect a fickle Kaiser spoils
 " Our triumph !—Friedrich ? Think you, I intend
 " Friedrich shall reap the fruits of blood I spend 850
 " And brain I waste ? Think you, the people clap
 " Their hands at my out-hewing this wild gap

824. best they kept] better keep. 828. lies] futile. must]
 means. 833. with a new] beneath a. 846. we] you. 847.
 These] The.

¹ Frederick II.

² He swears fealty to his son, and so gets that shadow of a name to fight under which he has been seeking.

" For any Friedrich to fill up ? 'Tis mine—
 " That's yours : I tell you, towards some such design
 " Have I worked blindly, yes, and idly, yes,
 " And for another, yes—but worked no less
 " With instinct at my heart ; I else had swerved,
 " While now—look round ! My cunning has preserved
 " Samminiato—that's a central place
 " Secures us Florence, boy,—in Pisa's case. 860
 " By land as she by sea ; with Pisa ours,
 " And Florence, and Pistoia, one devours
 " The land at leisure ! Gloriously dispersed—
 " Brescia, observe, Milan, Piacenza first
 " That flanked us (ah, you know not !) in the March ;
 " On these we pile, as keystone of our arch,
 " Romagna and Bologna, whose first span
 " Covered the Trentine and the Valsugan ;
 " Sofia's Egna by Bolgiano's sure ! " . . .
 So he proceeded : half of all this, pure 870
 Delusion, doubtless, nor the rest too true,
 But what was undone he felt sure to do,
 As ring by ring he wrung off, flung away
 The pauldron-rings to give his sword-arm play—
 Need of the sword now ! That would soon adjust
 Aught wrong at present ; to the sword intrust
 Sordello's whiteness, undersize : 'twas plain
 He hardly rendered right to his own brain—
 Like a brave hound, men educate to pride
 Himself on speed or scent nor aught beside, 880
 As though he could not, gift by gift, match men !
 Palma had listened patiently : but when
 'Twas time expostulate, attempt withdraw
 Taurello from his child, she, without awe
 Took off his iron arms from, one by one,
 Sordello's shrinking shoulders, and, that done,
 Made him avert his visage and relieve
 Sordello (you might see his corslet heave
 The while) who, loose, rose—tried to speak, then sank :
 They left him in the chamber. All was blank. 890
 And even reeling down the narrow stair
 Taurello kept up, as though unaware
 Palma was by to guide him, the old device
 —Something of Milan—" how we muster thrice
 " The Torriani's strength there ; all along

More
schemes

BOOK V " Our own Visconti cowed them "—thus the song
 Palma Continued even while she bade him stoop,
 and Thrid somehow, by some glimpse of arrow-loop,
 Taurello The turnings to the gallery below,
 leave the Where he stopped short as Palma let him go. 900
 chamber When he had sat in silence long enough
 Splintering the stone bench, braving a rebuff
 She stopped the truncheon ; only to commence
 One of Sordello's poems, a pretence
 For speaking, some poor rhyme of " Elys' hair
 " And head that's sharp and perfect like a pear,
 " So smooth and close are laid the few fine locks
 " Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks
 " Sun-blanced the livelong summer "—from his worst
 Performance, the Goito, as his first : 910
 And that at end, conceiving from the brow
 And open mouth no silence would serve now,
 Went on to say the whole world loved that man
 And, for that matter, thought his face, tho' wan,
 Eclipsed the Count's—he sucking in each phrase
 As if an angel spoke. The foolish praise
 Ended, he drew her on his mailed knees, made
 Her face a framework with his hands, a shade,
 A crown, an aureole : there must she remain
 (Her little mouth compressed with smiling pain 920
 As in his gloves she felt her tresses twitch)
 To get the best look at, in fittest niche
 In the Dispose his saint. That done, he kissed her brow,
 gallery —" Lauded her father for his treason now,"
 below He told her, " only, how could one suspect
 " The wit in him ?—whose clansman, recollect,
 " Was ever Salinguerra—she, the same,
 " Romano and his lady—so, might claim
 " To know all, as she should "—and thus begun
 Schemes with a vengeance, schemes on schemes, " not
 one 930
 " Fit to be told that foolish boy," he said,
 " But only let Sordello Palma wed,
 " —Then ! "

'Twas a dim long narrow place at best :
 Midway a sole grate showed the fiery West,
 As shows its corpse the world's end some split tomb—
 A gloom, a rift of fire, another gloom,

Faced Palma—but at length Taurello set
 Her free ; the grating held one ragged jet
 Of fierce gold fire : he lifted her within
 The hollow underneath—how else begin 940
 Fate's second marvellous cycle, else renew
 The ages than with Palma plain in view ?
 Then paced the passage, hands clenched, head erect,
 Pursuing his discourse ; a grand unchecked
 Monotony made out from his quick talk
 And the recurring noises of his walk ;
 —Somewhat too much like the o'ercharged assent
 Of two resolved friends in one danger blent,
 Who hearten each the other against heart ;
 Boasting there's nought to care for, when, apart 950
 The boaster, all's to care for. He, beside
 Some shape not visible, in power and pride
 Approached, out of the dark, ginglyly¹ near,
 Nearer, passed close in the broad light, his ear
 Crimson, eyeballs suffused, temples full-fraught,
 Just a snatch of the rapid speech you caught,
 And on he strode into the opposite dark,
 Till presently the harsh heel's turn, a spark
 I' the stone, and whirl of some loose embossed
 thong
 That crashed against the angle aye so long 960
 After the last, punctual to an amount
 Of mailed great paces you could not but count,—
 Prepared you for the pacing back again.
 And by the snatches you might ascertain
 That, Friedrich's Prefecture surmounted, left
 By this alone in Italy, they cleft
 Asunder, crushed together, at command
 Of none, were free to break up Hildebrand,
 Rebuild, he and Sordello, Charlemagne—
 But garnished, Strength with Knowledge, " if we deign
 " Accept that compromise and stoop to give 971
 " Rome law, the Cæsar's Representative."
 Enough, that the illimitable flood
 Of triumphs after triumphs, understood¹
 In its faint reflux (you shall hear) sufficed
 Young Ecelin for appanage, enticed

The scene
 in the
 gallery

Wild
 pro-
 phecies

¹ jingling-ly. Johnson gives the spelling " gingle."

Book V Him on till, these long quiet in their graves,
 He found 'twas looked for that a whole life's braves
 Should somehow be made good ; so, weak and worn,
 Must stagger up at Milan, one grey morn 980
 Of the to-come, and fight his latest fight.
 But, Salinguerra's prophecy at height—
 He voluble with a raised arm and stiff,
 A blaring voice, a blazing eye, as if
 He had our very Italy to keep
 Or cast away, or gather in a heap
 To garrison the better—ay, his word
 Was, " run the cucumber into a gourd,
 " Drive Trent upon Apulia " ¹—at their pitch
 Who spied the continents and islands which 990
 Grew mulberry leaves and sickles, in the map—
 (Strange that three such confessions so should hap
 To Palma,² Dante spoke with in the clear
 Amorous silence of the Swooning-sphere,—
Cunizza, as he called her ! Never ask
 Of Palma more !—She sat, knowing her task
 Was done, the labour of it,—for, success
 Concerned not Palma, passion's votaress.)
 Triumph at height, and thus Sordello crowned—
 Above the passage suddenly a sound 1000
 Stops speech, stops walk : back shrinks Taurello, bids
 The With large involuntary asking lids,
 summons Palma interpret. " 'Tis his own foot-stamp—
 " Your hand ! His summons ! Nay, this idle damp
 " Befits not ! " Out they two reeled dizzily.
 " Visconti's strong at Milan," resumed he,
 In the old, somewhat insignificant way—
 (Was Palma wont, years afterward, to say)
 As though the spirit's flight, sustained thus far,
 Dropped at that very instant.
 Envoy Gone they are— 1010
 Palma, Taurello ; Eglamor anon,
 Ecelin,—only Naddo's never gone !

977. on] omit. 978. whole] long. 991. mulberry leaves and
 sickles] grew sickles, mulberry leaflets. 999. and thus] I say
 1012. reads " Ecelin, Alberic . . . ah, Naddo's gone ! "

¹ That is join north and south Italy.

² Sordello, Adelaide and Taurello.

—Labours, this moonrise, what the Master meant :
“ Is Squarcialupo speckled ? ¹—purulent,
“ I’d say, but when was Providence put out ?
“ He carries somehow handily about
“ His spite nor fouls himself ! ” Goito’s vines
Stand like a cheat detected—stark rough lines,
The moon breaks through, a grey mean scale against
The vault where, this eve’s Maiden, thou remain’st 1020
Like some fresh martyr, eyes fixed—who can tell ?
As Heaven, now all’s at end, did not so well,
Spite of the faith and victory, to leave
Its virgin quite to death in the lone eve.
While the persisting hermit-bee . . . ha ! wait
No longer : these in compass, forward fate !

¹ Naddo, the personification of common-sense ; devoid alike of insight or a saving sense of humour, taking everything literally, is always with us. Browning may have had many critics of his own works in mind. Browningites were very Naddoish in the grim seriousness with which they discussed the most trivial points in their hero, and made mountains of meaning out of the molehills scattered through the acres of Browning’s poetry. “ Speckled,” used here as a moral quality tainted or spotted, offers a serious problem to such minds.

BOOK VI

INTRODUCTION

THE last book opens at the moment when Taurello and Palma leave the audience-chamber after the recognition, and Sordello is left alone. It records what passed within Sordello while Taurello is pacing the gallery below. Both are alike face to face with a supreme crisis, but with one it is spiritual, with the other material—the attitude of neither of them is intelligible to the other—all that is vital to Sordello is ignored by Taurello, and *vice versâ*, and yet both are conscious that to this point their lives have inevitably been guided, and that here is the valley of decision. It is as it were a three-fold crisis, but the solution of all alike lies with Sordello: it is his decision which will determine the fate not only of himself, but also of Taurello and of Palma.

It is necessary first of all to grasp the full significance of Sordello's position and the nature of the temptation before him. The one truth which has at last emerged from Sordello's soul, the tardy fruit of thought and suffering and failure, is the claim of the people. He not only feels but knows, that not only by virtue of the claims of abstract justice, but by the witness of his own supreme abilities, to throw in his lot with the people, to fight their battle, is his work: work that he can, will, and must do, by virtue of a necessity as it were forced upon him, and which he dare not shirk nor gainsay. He recognises further that to make such work effective he must use some medium to attain his end. That medium is the Church, not as it is, but as it should be—the Guelf ideal. True, because spiritual at its core, however overlaid and vitiated by misuse. To this cause he is wedded body and soul, for this he has pleaded, and to this he is prepared to dedicate all his power. One thing only is needed to set him on his path. Power in the sense of position is what he needs. Alone and unknown he cannot combat Pope and Em-

peror, Guelf and Ghibelline: his fate will be that of Crescentius or Rienzi. He has the Will, but means to execute it he has none. And now by Taurello's mad impulse the one thing he needs is put within his grasp—at a price—and that price the sacrifice of all his principles. Is he to accept?

Sordello, determined to get at the truth of things, begins by reviewing his life as a whole. There he sees that the real want has been the lack of one great inspiring force (such as others find in beauty, love, or intellect), to control his life, concentrate his powers, and give definite aim and purpose to his efforts. In consequence his life has been frittered and wasted, though his efforts have not been wrong so much as spasmodic and ill-directed. But the difficulty was to find that inspiration. If, as it seems, there was no power external to himself great enough to do this, was he meant to be a law unto himself? Was it that other natures weaker than his must have their ideals embodied, whereas such as he must find the inspiration of life in the bare formless want? If so, was he wrong in thinking, as he had done, that if Good is manifest, the Best, though it eludes us ever, must be somewhere? Or, to put it in a more practical shape, would it be right of him to forego the attempt to aid mankind in the whole for the betterment of a weak section only? Within himself Sordello knew that all service was alike, and that to confine oneself to some specific task does not mean the sacrifice of a larger work if the chance comes. But Sordello thought in universals, partly because to particularise meant the sacrifice of his world-claim, partly because it meant also that "dim, vulgar, vast, unobvious work" from which he shrank. Under the fascination of his ideal his resolution to help the people was fast slipping away when the thought of that morning's scene in Ferrara brought his duty back to him. Yes, he must help the people. But after all, how little can be done in a single lifetime! He has hardly time to make them grasp a single truth when life is over. How many too before him had started in hope to end in despair? Men who, tiring of the struggle or despairing of success, had flung themselves at last into hedonism, turned aside like Tannhauser to the Venus-

berg, "grown bestial dreaming how become divine!" What, after all, can the seeker after Truth win? Look at the whole sum of human Truth, what is it? A few sparks and no more.

But at this point, just as he was persuading himself that Truth is not worth seeking, which would have rendered his acceptance of Taurello's offer a simple matter, he got "a gleam." Because the amount of Truth so far discovered by man was but fragmentary, he had argued that Truth itself must be at fault. But might it not rather be that not Truth, but man's effort to find it, his readiness to live on the rare gleams he got, was the true cause of his poverty, and that a keener pursuit might reveal that buried fire which, once discovered, would set the whole world right?

What would this mean if applied to the practical problem? It meant this. Guelf and Ghibelline alike held to opposite fragments of truth, and each mistook their fragment for the whole. Sordello alone with his world-ideal could bring them into harmony. If, then, he forsook the whole to dwell in the parts, he must of necessity adopt partial truth with all its limitations and inherent wrongfulness. To become a Ghibelline or a Guelf meant the acceptance of the party programme. It meant partizanship, which spells injustice. Of the two, no doubt the Guelfs were the best, but if he threw in his lot with them, look what it would mean. A good man like Tito must be anathema simply because he was a Ghibelline, while a creature like the Legate must be cherished though he have no other virtue in his composition but the fact that he is a Guelf. No, he was right; he alone grasped human needs in a spirit above party. To accept the badge was to prostitute his soul, to pander to ignorance and injustice, to betray the cause entrusted to him by the people.

But he did not dash the badge to earth—he followed not the gleam. What makes him hesitate? Two thoughts intrude. First—if he held out, what would happen? Would he, by refusal of Taurello's offer, help the people? Could he, by pursuing his ideal unaided, assist them? In the end, no doubt, yes; but only when he was dead and gone would the true worth of what he had upheld be recognized; and in the

meantime? Then comes the second: the thirst for life and power and joy begins to surge within his soul. That this is his lower nature he knows, and he weaves a web of sophistry, true no doubt, but still sophistical, to cloak the surrender that it demands. Is not virtue born of vice? Is not the perception of good due to the presence of evil? Is it not so in nature? "Where the marshes stagnate, crystals branch." "Evil's beautified in every shape." Go a step further; does not pure joy pall; was not Sordello himself unhappy at Goito with a world at his feet? Make the unhappy happy and what takes place; do you not simply put him in a larger circle where new unhappiness begins afresh? The joy of the climber is in aspiration, not in attainment. Reach the summit and all we gain is "leave to look, not leave to do!" Thus good and evil are inextricably mingled; they are complementary one to the other. You cannot do without either; both are necessary. Why, then, should Sordello deny himself the joy of life, even though evil follows. Are not both sides necessary to the perfect life? To hold aloof from men, to be a prophet in the wilderness, were ultimately no doubt the higher part, but—

"how
This badge would suffer me improve my Now!"

It has been said that Sordello throughout this book argues like a modern, but no modern could think as he does in the passage which follows. It is a side of Sordello's character hitherto concealed and for which we are ill-prepared, but marvellously typical of the age in which he lived. That amazing life of the early Renaissance, in which piety and inhuman cruelty, art and lust, high ideals and brutal conduct, seemed to co-exist within the same individual, are here seen pouring from the depths of Sordello's soul. Life and power, vivid, tangible and unchecked, this is his cry. Life, full and beautiful, here and now; Heaven here and not hereafter. But Sordello signs no compact with the Devil. The outburst is but momentary and does not reflect the real longings of his soul. It is the alternative; even in the midst of it he repeats his willing-

ness to serve freely and with all his heart, so long as that service be real. If not—then he claims his hour—if not virtue, then vice; if not good, then evil! But we are not convinced; Sordello's bitter cry—

“together let wrath, hatred, lust
All tyrannies in every shape be thrust
Upon this Now”—

is unreal; it is not Sordello. We feel tempted to apply to him the Ghibelline remark made in the square as to Azzo—

“Este makes
Mirth for the Devil when he undertakes
To play the Ecelin”—

and this is what we feel Sordello in a moral sense is doing.

The struggle is drawing to a close. Sordello has stood upon the very verge of surrender, but he turns away in time. His hold on life is weakening, a new dawn is breaking. He clings to life, not now for its own sake, but to force the Master Hand to yield its secret; as one who says, “I will not let Thee go except Thou bless me.” The new light spreads, and with it comes the clearer vision; the garments of Time, sorrow and joy, virtue and vice, the larger and the less, slip from him. Earth life with all its varying powers and values is seen merged in a wider whole unguessed before, until at length

“The poor body soon
Sinks under what was meant a wondrous boon,
Leaving its bright accomplice all aghast.”

Sordello dies. The sound of his falling body reaches Palma and Taurello in the gallery below; they hasten up, to find him, with the badge beneath his foot, lifeless. At this point the story ends, but before gathering up the scattered threads of the story, Browning gives us a word of explanation as to Sordello. He failed by neglect of the facts of life. He tried to do too much. He ignored human limitations and broke beneath the strain. Sordello gone, the rest is soon made clear.

Salinguerra compromised and peace was made all round. A short sketch of subsequent events follows from 1224 to 1260, when the house of Romano was finally rooted out and became extinct, and the poem closes with a faint echo of Sordello's old Goito lay sung by a peasant child "on a brown and nameless hill."

Who would has heard Sordello's story told.

BOOK THE SIXTH

THE thought of Eglamor's least like a thought,
 And yet a false one, was, " Man shrinks to nought
 " If matched with symbols of immensity ;
 " Must quail, forsooth, before a quiet sky
 " Or sea, too little for their quietude ¹ : "
 And, truly, somewhat in Sordello's mood
 Confirmed its speciousness, while eve slow sank
 Down the near terrace to the farther bank,
 And only one spot left from out the night
 Glimmered upon the river opposite—
 A breadth of watery heaven like a bay,
 A sky-like space of water, ray for ray,
 And star for star, one richness where they mixed
 And this and that wing of an angel, fixed,
 Tumultuary splendours folded in
 To die. Nor turned he till Ferrara's din
 (Say, the monotonous speech from a man's lip
 Who lets some first and eager purpose slip
 In a new fancy's birth—the speech keeps on
 Though elsewhere its informing soul be gone)
 —Aroused him, surely offered succour. Fate
 Paused with this eve ; ere she precipitate
 Herself,—best put off new strange thoughts awhile,
 That voice, those large hands, that portentous smile,²—
 What help to pierce the future as the past

BOOK VI

The last
 struggle:
 Sordello
 alone

10

20

7. Eve slow] evening. 9. from out] out of. 23. best . . .
 new strange] put off strange after-thoughts . . .

¹ " Least like a thought " because it lacked all originality and was a mere platitude, and " false " because man's greatness lies not in his mere physical qualities, but in his self-consciousness and all that that implies.

² Sordello puts aside the new strange thoughts arising from his discovery that Salinguerra is his father, and keeping his ideal clear before him looks back over his past life.

Book VI Lay in the plaining city ?

And at last

The main discovery and prime concern,
 All that just now imported him to learn,
 Truth's self, like yonder slow moon to complete
 Reviews his past life Heaven, rose again, and, naked at his feet, 30
 Lighted his old life's every shift and change,
 Effort with counter-effort ; nor the range
 Of each looked wrong except wherein it checked,
 Some other—which of these could he suspect,
 Prying into them by the sudden blaze ?
 The real way seemed made up of all the ways ¹—
 Mood after mood of the one mind in him ;
 Tokens of the existence, bright or dim,
 Of a transcendent all-embracing sense
 Demanding only outward influence, 40
 A soul, in Palma's phrase, above his soul,
 Power to uplift his power,—such moon's control
 Over such sea-depths,—and their mass had swept
 Onward from the beginning and still kept
 Its course : but years and years the sky above
 Held none, and so, untasked of any love,
 His sensitiveness idled, now amort,
 Alive now, and, to sullenness or sport
 Given wholly up, disposed itself anew
 At every passing instigation, grew 50
 And dwindled at caprice, in foam-showers spilt,
 His power wasted Wedge-like insisting, quivered now a gilt
 Shield in the sunshine, now a blinding race
 Of whitest ripples o'er the reef—found place
 For much display ; not gathered up and, hurled
 Right from its heart, encompassing the world.
 So had Sordello been, by consequence,
 Without a function : others made pretence
 To strength not half his own, yet had some core
 Within, submitted to some moon, before 60
 Them still, superior still whate'er their force,—
 Were able therefore to fulfil a course,

29. Truth's self] His truth. 42. such] this. 55. much display] myriad charms.

¹ What Sordello is blindly looking for is a higher synthesis. His experience has outgrown his principles and his conclusions will no longer cover the facts.

Nor missed life's crown, authentic attribute.¹
 To each who lives must be a certain fruit
 Of having lived in his degree,—a stage,
 Earlier or later in men's pilgrimage,
 To stop at ; and to this the spirits tend
 Who, still discovering beauty without end,
 Amass the scintillations, make one star
 —Something unlike them, self-sustained, afar,— 70
 And meanwhile nurse the dream of being blest
 By winning it to notice and invest
 Their souls with alien glory, some one day
 Whene'er the nucleus, gathering shape away,
 Round to the perfect circle—soon or late,
 According as themselves are formed to wait ;
 Whether mere human beauty will suffice
 —The yellow hair and the luxurious eyes,
 Or human intellect seem best, or each
 Combine in some ideal form past reach 80
 On earth, or else some shade of these, some aim,
 Some love, hate even,² take their place, the same,
 So to be served—all this they do not lose,
 Waiting for death to live, nor idly choose
 What must be Hell—a progress thus pursued
 Through all existence, still above the food
 That's offered them, still fain to reach beyond
 The widened range, in virtue of their bond
 Of sovereignty. Not that a Palma's Love,
 A Salinguerra's Hate, would equal prove 90
 To swaying all Sordello : but why doubt
 Some love meet for such strength, some moon without
 Would match his sea ?—or fear, Good manifest,
 Only the Best breaks faith³ ?—Ah but the Best

BOOK VI
 Others
 did more
 than he

Con-
 trolled by
 an ideal
 80

67. to this the] to which those. 69. make] for. 77. mere]
 'tis. 83. So to] That may. 85. must be Hell] Hell shall be.
 87. fain to reach] towering. 91. but why] wherefore. 92. Some]
 omitted; moon] moon's. 93. Would] to.

¹ It is easier to describe Sordello by what he was not, or by
 what he might have been, than to say what exactly he was.
 With Browning definite character, made by definite deeds, good
 or even bad, is the crown of life.

² Palma exemplifies the former, Salinguerra the latter.

³ *I.e.* Why doubt that there must be some love meet for such
 strength as Sordello's, some moon to match his sea, or why fear

Book VI Somehow eludes us ever, still might be
 And is not ! Crave we gems ? No penury
 Of their material round us ! Pliant earth
 And plastic flame—what balks the mage his birth
 —Jacinth in balls or lodestone by the block ?
 Flinders enrich the strand, veins swell the rock ; 100
 Nought more ! Seek creatures ? Life's i' the tempest,
 thought

Clothes the keen hill-top, mid-day woods are fraught
 Nature's With fervours : human forms are well enough !
 wealth But we had hoped, encouraged by the stuff
 argues Profuse at nature's pleasure, men beyond
 human These actual men !—and thus are over-fond
 perfec- In arguing, from Good—the Best, from force
 tion Divided—force combined, an ocean's course
 From this our sea whose mere intestine pants
 Might seem at times sufficient to our wants.¹ 110

External power ! If none be adequate,
 And he stand forth ordained (a prouder fate)
 Himself a law to his own sphere ? “ Remove
 “ All incompleteness ! ” for that law, that love ?
 Nay, if all other laws be feints,—truth veiled
 Helpfully to weak vision that had failed
 To grasp aught but its special want,—for lure,
 Embodied ? Stronger vision could endure
 The unbodied want : no part—the whole of truth !
 The People were himself ; nor, by the ruth² 120

96. we : No] you : Where's. 100. veins swell] and veins.
 101. Nought : Seek] No : Ask. 103. human] ah these. 106.
 actual] omitted—perchance inserted after thus. 110. Might
 seem] Had seemed. 112. stand forth] had been.

that when good is manifest (in the case of ordinary man) the best alone (for which Sordello craved) will break faith ?

¹ Was not Sordello right in arguing from the lavish wealth and perfection of nature that the super-man was to be found ? Could he not fairly deduce from the actual presence of good the existence of the Best ? Yes, says Browning, but not on earth !

² Lines 117-120 have been re-written ; 1st edition reads—

“ A law to his own sphere ? The need remove
 All incompleteness be that law, that love ?
 Nay, really such be other's laws, though veiled
 In mercy to each vision that had failed
 If unassisted by its want for lure,
 Embodied ? Stranger vision could endure
 The simple want—no bauble for a truth.”

At their condition, was he less impelled
 To alter the discrepancy beheld,
 Than if, from the sound whole, a sickly part
 Subtracted were transformed, decked out with art,
 Then palmed on him as alien woe—the Guelf
 To succour, proud that he forsook himself.
 All is himself ; all service, therefore, rates
 Alike, nor serving one part, immolates
 The rest : but all in time ! “ That lance of yours
 “ Makes havoc soon with Malek and his Moors, 130
 “ That buckler’s lined with many a giant’s beard
 “ Ere long, our champion, be the lance upreared,
 “ The buckler wielded handsomely as now !
 “ But view your escort, bear in mind your vow,
 “ Count the pale tracts of sand to pass ere that,
 “ And, if you hope we struggle through the flat,
 “ Put lance and buckler by ! Next half-month lacks
 “ Mere sturdy exercise of mace and axe
 “ To cleave this dismal brake of prickly-pear
 “ Which bristling holds Cydippe by the hair, 140
 “ Lames barefoot Agathon : this felled, we’ll try
 “ The picturesque achievements by and by—
 “ Next life ¹ ! ”

Work, not
 dreams,
 needed

Ay, rally, mock, O People, urge
 Your claims !—for thus he ventured, to the verge,
 Push a vain mummerly which perchance distrust
 Of his fast-slipping resolution thrust
 Likewise ² : accordingly the Crowd—(as yet
 He had unconsciously contrived forget
 I’ the whole, to dwell o’ the points . . . one might assuage

127. All is himself] No : All’s himself. 132. our champion] Porphyrio. 138. Mere] A. 141-3] omitted from “ this felled ” to “ mock.” 147. Likewise] No less. 149. I’ the whole] omitted.

¹ Is not Sordello’s instinct true when he insists that he can help the world just as much in his claim to raise all people as if he narrows it down and lends his mind to the assistance of a mere party ideal ? Yes, but it must be real service—hard spade-work, not titanic dream-victories. There is no allusion in the names here, they are just imaginative creations of Browning’s.

² “ The vain mummerly ” is the old delusion that the triumphs won in imagination, “ Malek and his Moors ” to wit, are equivalent to real victories. The practical difficulties of his task tend to bring back the old self-consolation of what he could do if he tried, as evidenced by his wondrous feats in imagination.

Book VI The signal horrors easier than engage 150
 With a dim vulgar vast unobvious grief
 Not to be fancied off, nor gained relief
 In brilliant fits, cured by a happy quirk,
 But by dim vulgar vast unobvious work
 To correspond . . .) this Crowd then, forth they stood.
 The call " And now content thy stronger vision, brood
 of reality " On thy bare want ; uncovered, turf by turf,
 " Study the corpse-face thro' the taint-worms' scurf ! " ¹
 Down sank the People's Then ; uprose their Now.
 These sad ones render service to ! And how 160
 Piteously little must that service prove
 —Had surely proved in any case ! for, move
 Each other obstacle away, let youth
 Become aware it had surprised a truth
 'Twere service to impart—can truth be seized,
 Settled forthwith, and, of the captive eased,
 Its captor find fresh prey, since this alit
 So happily, no gesture luring it,
 The earnest of a flock to follow ? Vain,
 Most vain ! a life to spend ere this he chain 170
 To the poor crowd's complacence : ere the crowd
 Pronounce it captured, he descries a cloud
 Its kin of twice the plume ; which he, in turn,
 If he shall live as many lives, may learn
 How to secure : not else. Then Mantua called
 Back to his mind how certain bards were thrall'd
 —Buds blasted, but of breath more like perfume
 Than Naddo's staring nosegay's carrion bloom ;
 Some insane rose that burnt heart out in sweets,
 A spendthrift in the spring, no summer greets ; 180
 Some Dularete,² drunk with truths and wine,

150. easier] sooner. 152. nor gained] obtain. 155. this crowd
 then] however. 157. uncovered] the grave stript. 167. find
 fresh prey] look around. 173. the plume] plumage : " which "
 omitted. 179. Some insane] Could boast—some rose.

¹ That is, face the grim realities of life.

² This name occurs in Verci, where, in recounting a story of an outrage by Ecelin upon a certain Bianca de Rossi, who is said to have killed herself upon her husband's tomb rather than survive Ecelin's brutality, he says that " il conte Carlo Dottori sotto le nome di Eleuterio Dularete scrisse un dramma tragico sopra Bianca."

Grown bestial, dreaming how become divine.
 Yet to surmount this obstacle, commence
 With the commencement, merits crowning ! Hence
 Must truth be casual truth, elicited
 In sparks so mean, at intervals disspread
 So rarely, that 'tis like at no one time
 Of the world's story has not truth, the prime
 Of truth, the very truth which, loosed, had hurled
 The world's course right, been really in the world 190
 —Content the while with some mean spark by dint
 Of some chance-blow, the solitary hint
 Of buried fire, which, rip earth's breast, would stream
 Sky-ward !

' BOOK VI

Is truth
worth
seeking ?

Sordello's miserable gleam ¹
 Was looked for at the moment : he would dash
 This badge, and all it brought, to earth,—abash
 Taurello thus, perhaps persuade him wrest
 The Kaiser from his purpose,—would attest
 His own belief, in any case. Before
 He dashes it however, think once more ! 200
 For, were that little, truly service ? “ Ay,
 “ I' the end no doubt ; but meantime ? Plain you spy
 “ Its ultimate effect, but many flaws
 “ Of vision blur each intervening cause.
 “ Were the day's fraction clear as the life's sum
 “ Of service, Now as filled as teems To-come
 “ With evidence of good—nor too minute
 “ A share to vie with evil ! No dispute,
 “ 'Twere fittest maintain the Guelfs in rule :
 “ That makes your life's work : but you have to school
 “ Your day's work on these natures circumstanced 211
 “ Thus variously, which yet, as each advanced
 “ Or might impede the Guelf rule, must be moved

Is par-
tisan-
ship true
service ?

190. The worlds] Its course aright. 193. earth's] its. 199.
 His own belief] Constancy. 206. teems] the . . . 208. No]
 How.

¹ The gleam lay in the thought that perhaps the scarcity of truth, which hardly makes pursuit of it worth while, is due not so much to the fact that it is not there to find, as to the weakness of man's effort to discover it. If truth were not worth the seeking then Sordello could accept the badge and yield his principles, if on the other hand the fault lay in his own feeble efforts to find it to throw up his principles were despicable.

Book VI " Now, for the Then's sake,—hating what you loved,
 " Loving old hatreds ! Nor if one man bore
 " Brand upon temples while his fellow wore
 " The aureole, would it task you to decide :
 " But, portioned duly out, the future vied
 " Never with the unparcelled present ! Smite
 " Or spare so much on warrant all so slight ? 220
 " The present's complete sympathies to break,
 " Aversions bear with, for a future's sake
 " So feeble ? Tito ruined through one speck,
 " The Legate saved by his sole lightish fleck ?
 " This were work, true, but work performed at cost
 " Of other work ; aught gained here, elsewhere lost.
 " For a new segment spoil an orb half-done ?
 " Rise with the People one step, and sink—one ?
 " Were it but one step, less than the whole face
 " Of things, your novel duty bids erase ! 230
 " Harms to abolish ! What, the prophet saith,
 " The minstrel singeth vainly then ? Old faith,
 " Old courage, only born because of harms,
 " Were not, from highest to the lowest, charms ?
 " Flame may persist ; but is not glare as staunch ?
 " Where the salt marshes stagnate, crystals branch ;
 " Blood dries to crimson ; Evil's beautified
 " In every shape. Thrust Beauty then aside
 " And banish evil ! Wherefore ? After all,
 Is not evil " Is Evil a result less natural 240
 neces- " Than Good ? For overlook the season's strife
 sary ? " With tree and flower,—the hideous animal life,
 " (Of which who seeks shall find a grinning taunt
 " For his solution, and endure the vaunt
 " Of nature's angel, as a child that knows
 " Himself befooled, unable to propose
 " Aught better than the fooling)—and but care
 " For men, for the mere People then and there,—
 " In these, could you but see that Good and Ill
 " Claimed you alike ! Whence rose their claim but still
 " From Ill, as fruit of Ill ? What else could knit 251
 " You theirs but sorrow ? Any free from it

229. Were] Would. 231. to abolish] are to vanquish. 233.
 only . . . harms] born of the surrounding harms. 244. and] must.
 248. the mere] the varied. 249. In . . . that] Of which 'tis easy
 saying. 251. the as] the.

" Were also free from you ! Whose happiness
 " Could be distinguished in this morning's press
 " Of miseries ?—the fool's who passed a gibe
 " ' On thee,' jeered he, ' so wedded to thy tribe,
 " ' Thou carriest green and yellow tokens in
 " ' Thy very face that thou art Ghibellin !'
 " Much hold on you that fool obtained ! Nay mount
 " Yet higher—and upon men's own account 260
 " Must Evil stay : for, what is joy ?—to heave
 " Up one obstruction more, and common leave
 " What was peculiar, by such act destroy
 " Itself ; a partial death is every joy ;
 " The sensible escape, enfranchisement
 " Of a sphere's essence : once the vexed—content,
 " The cramped—at large, the growing circle—round,
 " All's to begin again—some novel bound
 " To break, some new enlargement to entreat ;
 " The sphere though larger is not more complete.¹ 270
 " Now for Mankind's experience : who alone
 " Might style the unobstructed world his own ?
 " Whom palled Goito with its perfect things ?
 " Sordello's self : whereas for Mankind springs
 " Salvation by each hindrance interposed.
 " They climb ; life's view is not at once disclosed
 " To creatures caught up, on the summit left,
 " Heaven plain above them, yet of wings bereft :
 " But lower laid, as at the mountain's foot.
 " So, range on range, the girdling forests shoot 280
 " 'Twixt your plain prospect and the throngs who scale
 " Height after height, and pierce mists, veil by veil,

Could
 good
 exist
 without
 evil ?

256. thee] one. 275. by each] omitted : read " hindrances."
 276. life's . . . not] not all life's view. 277. caught up] sudden.
 278. Heaven plain] With heaven. 281. Twixt . . . plain] Be-
 tween the. 282 reads : Earnestly even piercing veil by veil.

¹ Sordello's argument, framed to justify his desire to accept Taurello's offer, is that Good only exists through the presence of Evil: that 'Yes' is conceivable only because we conceive 'No.' Pure truth with no falsehood we could not distinguish from pure falsehood with no truth. It is as little possible to see in absolute unlimited light as in absolute unlimited darkness: vision is only possible when one is tempered by the other. It is Hegel's doctrine of the implication of opposites. (See Art. on Browning's Philosophy by J. B. Bury in *Browning Soc. Papers*).

Book VI "Heartened with each discovery ; in their soul,
 "The Whole they seek by Parts—but, found that
 Whole,
 Joy is "Could they revert, enjoy past gains ? The space
 in aspira- "Of time you judge so meagre to embrace
 tion "The Parts were more than plenty, once attained
 "The Whole, to quite exhaust it : nought were gained
 "But leave to look—not leave to do : Beneath
 "Soon sates the looker—look Above, and Death 290
 "Tempts ere a tithe of Life be tasted. Live
 "First, and die soon enough, Sordello ! Give
 "Body and spirit the first right they claim,
 "And pasture soul on a voluptuous shame
 "That you, a pageant-city's denizen,
 "Are neither vilely lodged midst Lombard men—
 "Can force joy out of sorrow, seem to truck
 "Bright attributes away for sordid muck,
 "Yet manage from that very muck educe
 "Gold ; then subject, nor scruple, to your cruce 300
 "The world's discardings ! Though real ingots pay
 "Your pains, the clods that yielded them are clay
 "To all beside,—would clay remain, though quenched
 "Your purging-fire ; who's robbed then ? Had you
 wrenched
 "An ampler treasure forth !—As 'tis, they crave
 "A share that ruins you and will not save
 "Them. Why should sympathy command you quit
 "That course that makes your joy, nor will remit
 "Their woe ? Would all arrive at joy ? Reverse
 "The order (time instructs you) nor coerce 310
 "Each unit till, some predetermined mode,
 "The total be emancipate ; men's road
 "Is one, men's times of travel many ; thwart
 "No enterprising soul's precocious start
 "Before the general march ! If slow or fast
 "All straggle up to the same point at last,
 "Why grudge your having gained, a month ago,
 "The brakes at balm-shed, asphodels in blow,

283. Heartened] Confirmed. 285. enjoy past gains] O testify !
 293. first] bare. 294. soul] thee. 298. Bright] Thine. 301.
 Though real] Think if . . . 303. beside] save thee. 305.
 ample] ampler. 307 reads : Yourself : imperiously command
 I quit. 312. men's] our.

" While they were landlocked? Speed their Then, but how Book VI

" This badge would suffer you improve your Now ! " 320

His time of action for, against, or with

Our world (I labour to extract the pith

Of this his problem) grew, that even-tide.

Gigantic with its power of joy, beside

The world's eternity of impotence

To profit though at his whole joy's expense.

" Making nothing of my day because so brief ?

" Rather make more : instead of joy, use grief

" Before its novelty have time subside !

" Wait not for the late savour, leave untried 330

" Virtue, the creaming honey-wine, quick squeeze

" Vice like a biting spirit from the lees

" Of life ! Together let wrath, hatred, lust,

" All tyrannies in every shape, be thrust

" Upon this Now, which time may reason out

" As mischiefs, far from benefits, no doubt ;

" But long ere then Sordello will have slept

" Away ; you teach him at Goito's crypt,

" There's a blank issue to that fiery thrill.

" Stirring, the few cope with the many, still : 340

" So much of sand as, quiet, makes a mass

" Unable to produce three tufts of grass,

" Shall, troubled by the whirlwind, render void

" The whole calm glebe's endeavour : be employed !

" And e'en though somewhat smart the Crowd for this,

" Contribute each his pang to make your bliss,

" 'Tis but one pang—one blood-drop to the bowl

" Which brimful tempts the sluggish asp uncowl

" At last, stains ruddily the dull red cape,

" And, kindling orbs grey as the unripe grape 350

" Before, avails forthwith to disentrance

" The portent, soon to lead a mystic dance

" Among you ! For, who sits alone in Rome ?

" Have those great hands indeed hewn out a home,

" And set me there to live ? Oh life, life-breath,

" Life-blood,—ere sleep, come travail, life ere death !

The lust
of the
flesh
calleth

323. his problem] and more. 328. use] take . . . 330. Wait
not] No time. 341. sand] dust. 346. your] up. 349. At last]
So quick. 350. grey] dull. 356. Compare the reverse.—
Spenser. 352. The portent] The mischief. 355. And . . . ,
live] For me—compelled to live. 356. come] be.

- Book VI " This life stream on my soul, direct, oblique,
 " But always streaming ! Hindrances ? They pique :
 " Helps ? such . . . but why repeat, my soul o'ertops
 " Each height, then every depth profoundlier drops ? 360
- The pride " Enough that I can live, and would live ! Wait
 of life " For some transcendent life reserved by Fate
 " To follow this ? Oh, never ! Fate, I trust
 " The same, my soul to ; for, as who flings dust,
 " Perchance (so facile was the deed) she chequed
 " The void with these materials to affect
 " My soul diversely : these consigned anew
 " To nought by death, what marvel if she threw
 " A second and superber spectacle
 " Before me ? What may serve for sun, what still 370
 " Wander a moon above me ? What else wind
 " About me like the pleasures left behind,
 " And how shall some new flesh that is not flesh
 " Cling to me ? What's new laughter ? Soothes the fresh
 " Sleep like sleep ? Fate's exhaustless for my sake
 " In brave resource : but whether bids she slake
 " My thirst at this first rivulet, or count
 " No draught worth lip save from some rocky fount
 " Above i' the clouds, while here she's provident
 " Of pure loquacious pearl, the soft tree-tent 380
 " Guards, with its face of reate and sedge, nor fail
 " The silver globules and gold-sparkling grail
 " At bottom ? Oh, 'twere too absurd to slight
 " For the hereafter the to-day's delight !
- The lust " Quench thirst at this, then seek next well-spring : wear
 of the " Home-lilies ere strange lutos in my hair !
 eyes " Here is the Crowd, whom I with freest heart
 " Offer to serve, contented for my part
 " To give life up in service,—only grant
 " That I do serve ; if otherwise, why want 390
 " Aught further of me ? If men cannot choose
 " But set aside life, why should I refuse
 " The gift ? I take it—I, for one, engage
 " Never to falter through my pilgrimage—
 " Nor end it howling that the stock or stone
 " Were enviable, truly : I, for one,

357. stream on] to feed. 360. Each] All; then] than; profoundlier] profounder. 380. pure] (taste). 389. in service] once for all. 390. That I do] I really.

" Will praise the world, you style mere anteroom
 " To palace—be it so ! shall I assume
 " —My foot the courtly gait, my tongue the trope,
 " My mouth the smirk, before the doors fly ope 400
 " One moment ? What ? with guarders row on row,
 " Gay swarms of varletry that come and go,
 " Pages to dice with, waiting-girls unlace
 " The plackets of, pert claimants help displace,
 " Heart-heavy suitors get a rank for,—laugh
 " At yon sleek parasite, break his own staff
 " 'Cross Beetle-brows the Usher's shoulder,—why
 " Admitted to the presence by and by,
 " Should thought of having lost these make me grieve
 " Among new joys I reach, for joys I leave ? 410
 " Cool citrine-crystals, fierce pyropus-stone,
 " Are floor-work there ! But do I let alone
 " That black-eyed peasant in the vestibule
 " Once and for ever ?—Floor-work ? No such fool !
 " Rather, were heaven to forestall earth, I'd say
 " I, is it, must be blest ? Then, my own way
 " Bless me ! Give firmer arm and fleeter foot,
 " I'll thank you : but to no mad wings transmute
 " These limbs of mine—our greensward was so soft !
 " Nor camp I on the thunder-cloud aloft : 420
 " We feel the bliss distinctlier, having thus
 " Engines subservient, not mixed up with us.
 " Better move palpably through heaven : nor, freed
 " Of flesh, forsooth, from space to space proceed
 " 'Mid flying synods of worlds ! No : in heaven's marge
 " Show Titan still, recumbent o'er his targe
 " Solid with stars—the Centaur at his game,
 " Made tremulously out in hoary flame !
 " Life ! Yet the very cup whose extreme dull
 " Dregs, even, I would quaff, was dashed, at full, 430
 " Aside so oft ; the death I fly, revealed
 " So oft a better life this life concealed,
 " And which sage, champion, martyr, through each path
 " Have hunted fearlessly—the horrid bath,
 " The crippling-irons and the fiery chair.

Here not
here-
after

398. To . . . so] To the true palace, but. 400. My mouth
 the smirk] My eye the glance. 409. having lost these] these
 recurring. 410. joys] sights, 412. Are floor work there] Bare
 floorwork, too ! 416. I, it is, etc.] Must I be blessed or you ?

Book VI " 'Twas well for them ; let me become aware
 " As they, and I relinquish life, too ! Let
 " What masters life disclose itself ! Forget
 " Vain ordinances, I have one appeal—
 " I feel, am what I feel, know what I feel ; 440
 " So much is truth to me. What Is, then ? Since
 " One object, viewed diversely, may evince
 " Beauty and ugliness—this way attract,
 " That way repel,—why gloze upon the fact ?
 " Why must a single of the sides be right ?
 " What bids choose this and leave the opposite ?
 " Where's abstract Right for me ?—in youth endued
 " With Right still present, still to be pursued,
 " Thro' all the interchange of circles, rife
 " Each with its proper law and mode of life, 450
 " Each to be dwelt at ease in : where, to sway
 " Absolute with the Kaiser, or obey
 " Implicit with his serf of fluttering heart,
 " Or, like a sudden thought of God's, to start
 " Up, Brutus in the presence, then go shout
 " That some should pick the unstrung jewels out—
 " Each, well ! "

And, as in moments when the past
 Gave partially enfranchisement, he cast
 Himself quite through mere secondary states
 Of his soul's essence, little loves and hates, 460
 Into the mid deep yearnings overlaid
 By these ; as who should pierce hill, plain, grove, glade,
 And on into the very nucleus probe
 That first determined there exist a globe.
 As that were easiest, half the globe dissolved,
 So seemed Sordello's closing-truth evolved
 By his flesh-half's break-up ; the sudden swell
 Of his expanding soul showed Ill and Well,
 Sorrow and Joy, Beauty and Ugliness,
 Virtue and Vice, the Larger and the Less, 470
 All qualities, in fine, recorded here,
 Might be but modes of Time and this one sphere,
 Urgent on these, but not of force to bind

438. What masters life] Life's secret but . . . 447. Where's]
 No. 451. where] thus. 452. Absolute] Regally. 455. Brutus]
 omitted : insert " forth and " after " go." 461. deep] vague,

Eternity, as Time—as Matter—Mind,
 If Mind, Eternity, should choose assert
 Their attributes within a Life : thus girt
 With circumstance, next change beholds them cinct
 Quite otherwise—with Good and Ill distinct,
 Joys, sorrows, tending to a like result—
 Contrived to render easy, difficult, 480
 This or the other course of . . . what new bond
 In place of flesh may stop their flight beyond
 Its new sphere, as that course does harm or good
 To its arrangements. Once this understood,
 As suddenly he felt himself alone,
 Quite out of Time and this world : all was known.
 What made the secret of his past despair ?
 —Most imminent when he seemed most aware
 Of his own self-sufficiency : made mad
 By craving to expand the power he had, 490 He has
 And not new power to be expanded ?—just tried too
 This made it ; Soul on Matter being thrust, much
 Joy comes when so much Soul is wreaked in Time
 On Matter : let the Soul's attempt sublime
 Matter beyond the scheme and so prevent
 By more or less that deed's accomplishment,
 And Sorrow follows : Sorrow how avoid ?
 Let the employer match the thing employed,
 Fit to the finite his infinity,
 And thus proceed for ever, in degree 500
 Changed but in kind the same, still limited
 To the appointed circumstance and dead
 To all beyond. A sphere is but a sphere ;
 Small, Great, are merely terms we bandy here ;
 Since to the spirit's absoluteness all
 Are like. Now, of the present sphere we call
 Life, are conditions ; take but this among
 Many ; the body was to be so long
 Youthful, no longer : but, since no control
 Tied to that body's purposes his soul, 510
 She chose to understand the body's trade
 More than the body's self—had fain conveyed
 Her boundless to the body's bounded lot.

474. Eternity is Time] As Time—Eternity. 489. reads—"Of
 greatness in the Past—nought turned him mad like . . . 495.
 the] its. 497. how] to. 511. She] It : so throughout.

BOOK VI Hence, the soul permanent, the body not,—
 Neglected Scarcely its minute for enjoying here,—
 life's con- The soul must needs instruct her weak compeer,
 ditions Run o'er its capabilities and wring
 A joy thence, she held worth experiencing :
 Which, far from half discovered even,—lo,
 The minute gone, the body's power let go 520
 Apportioned to that joy's acquirement ! Broke
 Morning o'er earth, he yearned for all it woke—
 From the volcano's vapour-flag, winds hoist
 Black o'er the spread of sea,—down to the moist
 Dale's silken barley-spikes sullied with rain,
 Swayed earthwards, heavily to rise again—
 The Small, a sphere as perfect as the Great
 To the soul's absoluteness. Meditate
 Too long on such a morning's cluster-chord
 And the whole music it was framed afford,— 530
 The chord's might half discovered, what should pluck
 One string, his finger, was found palsy-struck.
 And then no marvel if the spirit, shown
 A saddest sight—the body lost alone
 Through her officious proffered help, deprived
 Of this and that enjoyment Fate contrived,—
 Virtue, Good, Beauty, each allowed slip hence,—
 Vain-gloriously were fain, for recompense,
 To stem the ruin even yet, protract
 The body's term, supply the power it lacked 540
 From her infinity, compel it learn
 These qualities were only Time's concern,
 and dies And body may, with spirit helping, barred—
 Advance the same, vanquished—obtain reward,
 Reap joy where sorrow was intended grow,
 Of Wrong made Right, and turn Ill Good below.
 And the result is, the poor body soon
 Sinks under what was meant a wondrous boon,
 Leaving its bright accomplice all aghast.
 So much was plain then, proper in the past ; 550
 To be complete for, satisfy the whole
 Series of spheres—Eternity, his soul

522. he yearned] omitted : " say " before morning, and before
 for. 523. winds] to. 524. down] omitted. 529. Too long]
 omitted. Autumn-morning. 531. half] omitted. 533. no] what.
 543. spirit helping] its assistance.

Needs must exceed, prove incomplete for, each
 Single sphere—Time. But does our knowledge reach
 No farther? Is the cloud of hindrance broke
 But by the failing of the fleshly yoke,
 Its loves and hates, as now when death lets soar
 Sordello, self-sufficient as before,
 Though during the mere space that shall elapse
 'Twixt his enthrallment in new bonds perhaps? 560
 Must life be ever just escaped, which should
 Have been enjoyed?—nay, might have been and would,
 Each purpose ordered right—the soul's no whit
 Beyond the body's purpose under it.
 Like yonder breadth of watery heaven, a bay,
 And that sky-space of water, ray for ray
 And star for star, one richness where they mixed
 And this and that wing of an angel, fixed,
 Tumultuary splendours folded in
 To die—would soul, proportioned thus, begin 570
 Exciting discontent, or surelier quell
 The body if, aspiring, it rebel?
 But how so order life? Still brutalize
 The soul, the sad world's way, with muffled eyes
 To all that was before, all that shall be
 After this sphere—all and each quality
 Save some sole and immutable Great, Good
 And Beauteous whither fate has loosed its hood
 To follow? Never may some soul see All
 —The Great Before and After, and the Small 580
 Now, yet be saved by this the simplest lore,
 And take the single course prescribed before,
 As the king-bird with ages on his plumes
 Travels to die in his ancestral glooms?
 But where descry the Love that shall select
 That course? Here is a soul whom, to affect,
 Nature has plied with all her means, from trees
 And flowers e'en to the Multitude!—and these,
 Decides he save or no? One word to end!
 Ah my Sordello, I this once befriend 590

How
 order
 life?

553. reads—"Exceeded, so was incomplete for, each one sphere—our Time." 558. Sordello] The spirit. 559. during the mere] but a single. 561. just] but. 570. would . . . thus] and which thus, far from first. 571. surelier] surest quelled—rebelled.

Book VI And speak for you. Of a Power above you still
 Which, utterly incomprehensible,
 Is out of rivalry, which thus you can
 Love, tho' unloving all conceived by man—
 What might What need! And of—none the minutest duct
 have To that out-nature, nought that would instruct
 saved And so let rivalry begin to live—
 him But of a Power its representative
 Who, being for authority the same,
 Communication different, should claim
 A course, the first chose but this last revealed—
 This Human clear, as that Divine concealed—
 What utter need¹!

600

What has Sordello found?
 Or can his spirit go the mighty round,
 End where poor Eglamor begun²? So, says
 Old fable, the two eagles went two ways
 About the world: where, in the midst, they met,
 Though on a shifting waste of sand, men set
 Jove's temple.³ Quick, what has Sordello found?
 For they approach—approach—that foot's rebound 610
 Palma? No, Salinguerra though in mail;
 They mount, have reached the threshold, dash the veil
 Aside—and you divine who sat there dead,
 Under his foot the badge: still, Palma said,
 A triumph lingering in the wide eyes,
 Wider than some spent swimmer's if he spies
 Help from above in his extreme despair,
 And, head far back on shoulder thrust, turns there
 With short quick passionate cry: as Palma pressed

605. poor Eglamor] our souls. 606. eagles went] doves were sent.

A.² ¹ The Christian teaching of Love as revealed through God and Christ might have proved ~~than~~ higher synthesis Sordello sought in vain. Without it all is dark, no answer came to his cry for light—he dies.

² It was Love which was the saving quality in Eglamor and which Sordello could not find. The previous passage, however, indicates a higher need in Sordello than in Eglamor, though he was on the right path.

³ The story told us here of the origin of Delphi is given in Frazer's *Pausanias*, and with doves for eagles in Lempriere's *Classical Dictionary*. It was supposed to be the centre of the earth—as Love is the centre of life.

In one great kiss, her lips upon his breast,
It beat.

620 Book VI
At Rest

By this, the hermit-bee has stopped
His day's toil at Goito : the new-cropped
Dead vine-leaf answers, now 'tis eve, he bit,
Twirled so, and filed all day : the mansion's fit,
God counselled for. As easy guess the word
That passed betwixt them, and become the third
To the soft small unfrighted bee, as tax
Him with one fault—so, no remembrance racks
Of the stone maidens and the font of stone
He, creeping through the crevice, leaves alone.
Alas, my friend, alas Sordello, whom
Anon they laid within that old font-tomb,
And, yet again, alas !

630

And now is't worth
Our while bring to mind, much less set forth
How Salinguerra extricates himself
Without Sordello ? Ghibellin and Guelf
May fight their fiercest out ? If Richard sulked
In durance or the Marquis paid his mulct,
Who cares, Sordello gone ? The upshot, sure,
Was peace ; our chief made some frank overture
That prospered ; compliment fell thick and fast
On its disposer, and Taurello passed

After-
math

640

With foe and friend for an outstripping soul,
Nine days at least. Then,—fairly reached the goal,—
He, by one effort, blotted the great hope
Out of his mind, nor further tried to cope
With Este, that mad evening's style, but sent
Away the Legate and the League, content
No blame at least the brothers had incurred,
—Dispatched a message to the Monk, he heard
Patiently first to last, scarce shivered at,
Then curled his limbs up on his wolfskin mat
And ne'er spoke more,—informed the Ferrarese
He but retained their rule so long as these
Lingered in pupilage,—and last, no mode
Apparent else of keeping safe the road
From Germany direct to Lombardy

The
Sequel

650

632. old] cold. 637. out] omitted : " Count " Richard.
646. nor] no.

BOOK VI For Friedrich,— none, that is, to guarantee
 After- The faith and promptitude of who should next
 math Obtain Sofia's dowry,—sore perplexed— 660
 (Sofia being youngest of the tribe
 Of daughters, Ecelin was wont to bribe
 The envious magnates with ¹—nor, since he sent
 Henry of Egna this fair child, had Trent
 Once failed the Kaiser's purposes—" we lost
 " Egna last year, and who takes Egna's post—
 " Opens the Lombard gate if Friedrich knock ? ")
 Himself espoused the Lady of the Rock
 In pure necessity, and, so destroyed
 His slender last of chances, quite made void 670
 Old prophecy, and spite of all the schemes
 Overt and covert, youth's deeds, age's dreams,
 Was sucked into Romano. And so hushed
 He up this evening's work that, when 'twas brushed
 Somehow against by a blind chronicle ²
 Which, chronicling whatever woe befell
 Ferrara, noted this the obscure woe
 Of " Salinguerra's sole son Giacomo
 " Deceased, fatuous and doting, ere his sire,"
 The townsfolk rubbed their eyes, could but admire 680
 Which of Sofia's five was meant.³

The chaps

Of earth's dead hope were tardy to collapse,
 Obliterated not the beautiful
 Distinctive features at a crash : but dull
 And duller these, next year, as Guelfs withdrew

664. Henry of] Enrico. 677. noted] scented. 678. Of] And.
 681. was] he. 682. earth's] his. 684. but] scarce. 685. reads]
 " Next year, as Azzo, Boniface withdrew."

¹ Sophia was the third of Adelaide's daughters, Cunizza being the last and youngest. Henry of Egna was of an old established Tyrolese family, whose castle lay between Trent and Bolgiano. By Sophia he had two children, Henry and Ecelin, named after his uncle. He died young ; and as here related Sophia married Salinguerra ; the date of her second marriage is uncertain, but it was, says Verci, before 1224.

² *The Parva Chronica Ferrariensis* ; see Introd.

³ See table of family. Browning is right as to number, but wrong historically as to the mother. According to Frizzi, in his *Storia di Ferrara*, Salinguerra had five children by his first wife Retrude, and one by Sophia, *i.e.* Giacomo.

Each to his stronghold. Then (securely too
 Ecelin at Campese slept ; close by,
 Who likes may see him in Solagna lie,
 With cushioned head and gloved hand to denote
 The cavalier he was) ¹—then his heart smote 690
 Young Ecelin at last ; long since adult.
 And, save Vicenza's business, what result
 In blood and blaze ? (So hard to intercept
 Sordello till his plain withdrawal !) Stepped
 Then its new lord on Lombardy. I' the nick
 Of time when Ecelin and Alberic
 Closed with Taurello,² come precisely news
 That in Verona half the souls refuse
 Allegiance to the Marquis and the Count—
 Have cast them from a throne they bid him mount, 700
 Their Podestà, thro' his ancestral worth.
 Ecelin flew there,³ and the town henceforth
 Was wholly his—Taurello sinking back
 From temporary station to a track
 That suited. News received of this acquist,
 Friedrich did come to Lombardy⁴ : who missed
 Taurello then ? Another year : they took
 Vicenza, left the Marquis scarce a nook

Book VI
 After-
 math

691. at last] conceive. 694. his plain withdrawal] Sordello's option. 690. Ecelin] he at last. 697. come] came.

¹ Campese, which is two miles above Bassano on the west bank of the Brenta, had a Benedictine monastery, founded by old Ecelin the Stammerer. Remains of it are still there adjoining the Parish Church; while at Solagna, half a mile higher up on the east side, there is a sculptured slab of a Benedictine monk, gloved and cushioned, built into the north wall horizontally, on the outside of the church. This, tradition says, is Ecelin the monk's very tomb. He possibly died at Oliero, three miles higher up, was buried at Campese, and in the desecration of everything connected with the family which followed after 1260 the top of the tomb may have been thrown out and finally got built into the church at Solagna. They may very likely have brought the materials for Solagna from the old monastery at Campese.

² This refers to Salinguerra's marriage with Henry of Egna's widow, Ecelin's sister ; by which the last hopes of Salinguerra's success as an independent chief vanished and he was "sucked into Romano;" see 665 ff.

³ This was in the winter of 1227. It was incredible says Maurisio with what speed Ecelin reached Verona, "quasi volitando per aera sic celeriter Veronam intravit."

⁴ In 1236, Frederic joined Ecelin in Verona.

Book VI For refuge, and, when hundreds two or three
 After- Of Guelfs conspired to call themselves "The Free,"¹ 710
 math Opposing Alberic,—vile Bassanese,—
 (Without Sordello!)—Ecelin at ease
 Slaughtered them so observably, that oft
 A little Salinguerra looked with soft
 Blue eyes up, asked his sire the proper age
 To get appointed his proud uncle's page.
 More years passed, and that sire had dwindled down
 To a mere showy turbulent soldier, grown
 Better through age, his parts still in repute,
 Subtle—how else?—but hardly so astute 720
 As his contemporaneous friends professed;
 Undoubtedly a brawler: for the rest,
 Known by each neighbour, and allowed for, let
 Keep his incorrigible ways, nor fret
 Men who would miss their boyhood's bugbear: "trap
 "The ostrich, suffer our bald osprey flap
 "A battered pinion!"—was the word. In fine,
 One flap too much and Venice's marine
 Was meddled with; no overlooking that²!
 She captured him in his Ferrara, fat 730
 And florid at a banquet,³ more by fraud
 Than force, to speak the truth; there's slender laud
 Ascribed you for assisting eighty years
 To pull his death on such a man; fate shears
 The life-cord prompt enough whose last fine thread
 You fritter: so, presiding his board-head,
 The old smile, your assurance all went well
 With Friedrich (as if he were like to tell!)

710. Of Guelfs] After. 711. vile] there. 730. She] We.
 737. The old] A great.

¹ This is mentioned by Maurisio: *Tempore istius conspiraverunt quidam contra Albericum et ejus masnatam et faciebant se vocari Partem liberorum. . . . Dominus autem Ecelinus . . . violententer et manu potente Baxianum intravit ipsosque proditores expugnando superavit.*

² Laurentius, in his *Venetian Chronicle*, records that the alliance of the Venetians with Azzo and the army which captured Salinguerra at Ferrara in 1240 was due to Ecelin's pride in daring to attack Venetian territory, "ausus fuerit invadere fines Venetos."

³ The story is recorded at length by Ricobaldi (see *Introd.*) Salinguerra was betrayed by his lieutenant Ugo da Ramberti who had been bribed by Azzo.

In rushed (a plan contrived before) our friends,
 Made some pretence at fighting, some amends
 For the shame done his eighty years—(apart
 The principle, none found it in his heart
 To be much angry with Taurello)—gained
 Their galleys with their prize, and what remained
 But carry him to Venice for a show¹ ?
 —Set him, as 'twere, down gently—free to go
 His gait, inspect our square, pretend observe
 The swallows soaring their eternal curve
 'Twixt Theodore and Mark, if citizens
 Gathered importunately, fives and tens,
 To point their children the Magnifico,
 All but a monarch once in firm-land, go
 His gait among them now—" it took, indeed,
 " Fully this Ecelin to supersede
 " That man," remarked the seniors. Singular !
 Sordello's inability to bar
 Rivals the stage, that evening, mainly brought
 About by his strange disbelief that aught
 Was ever to be done,—this thrust the Twain²
 Under Taurello's tutelage,—whom, brain
 And heart and hand, he forthwith in one rod
 Indissolubly bound to baffle God
 Who loves the world—and thus allowed the thin
 Grey wizened dwarfish devil Ecelin,³
 And massy-muscled big-boned Alberic
 (Mere man, alas !) to put his problem quick

Book VI

740 After-
mathCapture
of Salin-
guerra,
1240

750

760

740. some] just. 759. ever] omit : fairly before thrust.

¹ Salinguerra, after his capture by Venice and the allies at Ferrara in 1240, spent the last five years of his life in captivity at Venice as Browning relates.

² That is, Alberic and Ecelin, the sons of the monk. As a matter of fact they were both adults long since, and Alberic had even assisted at Salinguerra's capture out of pique at his brother's recent marriage with Selvaggia, the Emperor's daughter, with whom he was said to be in love.

³ " Una notte mentre Adelaide dormiva con suo marito, le comparve un demonio e a viva forza volle aver commercio con lei ; dal qual illegitimo congresso nacque Ecelino." Aliprandi and Platina both relate this story, which is followed by many others, and versified by Ariosto in his *Orlando Furioso*—

" Ezzelino immanissimo tiranno
 Che fia creduto figlio del demonio."

BOOK VI To demonstration—prove wherever's will

After- To do, there's plenty to be done, or ill

math Or good. Anointed, then, to rend and rip—

Kings of the gag and flesh-hook, screw and whip, 770

They plagued the world : a touch of Hildebrand

(So far from obsolete !) made Lombards band

Together, cross their coats as for Christ's cause,

And saving Milan ¹ win the world's applause.

Ecelin perished : and I think grass grew

Never so pleasant as in Valley Rù

Fate of By San Zenon where Alberic in turn

Alberic Saw his exasperated captors burn

Seven children and their mother ; then, regaled

So far, tied on to a wild horse, was trailed 780

To death through raunce and bramble-bush.² I take

God's part and testify that 'mid the brake

Wild o'er his castle on the pleasant knoll,

You hear its one tower left, a belfry, toll—

The earthquake spared it last year, laying flat

The modern church beneath,—no harm in that !

Chirrup the contumacious grasshopper,

Rustles the lizard and the cushats chirre

Above the ravage : there, at deep of day

A week since, heard I the old Canon say 790

He saw with his own eyes a barrow burst

And Alberic's huge skeleton unheard

Only five years ago. He added, " June's

" The month for carding off our first cocoons

" The silkworms fabricate "—a double news,

Nor he nor I could tell the worthier.³ Choose !

779. and] with. 783. the pleasant] Zenone's. 785-786] omittd.

¹ Ecelin's last *coup* was an attempt upon Milan which would have given him all Lombardy ; in this he failed, and was wounded and captured in the subsequent fighting.

² After Ecelin's death Alberic took refuge with his family in his castle of San Zenon, three miles south of Bassano. Here he was besieged and forced to capitulate. His captors, who had taken a solemn vow to extirpate the whole race, killed his wife and children before his face, and finally slaughtered Alberic himself, as Browning relates. The story is circumstantially told by Rolandino and others, and critically by Verci.

³ San Zenone lies midway between Bassano and Asolo, where the remains of the old castle still exist.

And Naddo gone, all's gone ; not Eglamor !
 Believe, I knew the face I waited for,
 A guest my spirit of the golden courts !
 Oh strange to see how, despite ill-reports,
 Disuse, some wear of years, that face retained
 Its joyous look of love ! Suns waxed and waned,
 And still my spirit held an upward flight,
 Spiral on spiral, gyres of life and light
 More and more gorgeous—ever that face there
 The last admitted ! crossed, too, with some care
 As perfect triumph were not sure for all,
 But, on a few, enduring damp must fall,
 —A transient struggle, haply a painful sense
 Of the inferior nature's clinging—whence
 Slight starting tears easily wiped away,
 Fine jealousies soon stifled in the play
 Of irrepressible admiration—not
 Aspiring, all considered, to their lot
 Who ever, just as they prepare ascend
 Spiral on spiral, wish thee well, impend
 Thy frank delight at their exclusive track,
 That upturned fervid face and hair put back !

Is there no more to say ? He of the rhymes—
 Many a tale, of this retreat betimes,
 Was born : Sordello die at once for men ?
 The Chroniclers of Mantua tired their pen
 Telling how *Sordello Prince Visconti* saved
 Mantua,¹ and elsewhere notably behaved—
 Who thus, by fortune ordering events,
 Passed with posterity, to all intents,
 For just the god he never could become.
 As Knight, Bard, Gallant, men were never dumb
 In praise of him : while what he should have been,
 Could be, and was not—the one step too mean
 For him to take,—we suffer at this day
 Because of : Ecelin had pushed away
 Its chance ere Dante could arrive and take

Book VI
 After-
 math
 800
 A Last
 glimpse
 of Eglamor

810

820

The Sordello of Romance

830

823. Sordello] a.

¹ Platina, in his *Storia di Mantova*, and following him Aliprandi, in his rhymed chronicle, makes Sordello a scion of the house of Visconti. He saved Mantua by repulsing Ezzelino da Romano and compelling him to raise the siege of the city.

Book VI That step Sordello spurned, for the world's sake :

After- He did much—but Sordello's chance was gone.

math Thus, had Sordello dared that step alone,
 Apollo had been compassed ; 'twas a fit
 He wished should go to him, not he to it
 —As one content to merely be supposed
 Singing or fighting elsewhere, while he dozed 840

Really at home—one who was chiefly glad
 To have achieved the few real deeds he had,
 Because that way assured they were not worth
 Doing, so spared from doing them henceforth—
 A tree that covets fruitage and yet tastes
 Never itself, itself. Had he embraced
 Their cause then, men had plucked Hesperian fruit
 And, praising that, just thrown him in to boot
 All he was anxious to appear, but scarce
 Solicitous to be. A sorry farce 850

Such life is, after all ! Cannot I say
 He lived for some one better thing ? this way.—
 Lo, on a heathy brown and nameless hill
 By sparkling Asolo,¹ in mist and chill,
 and of Morning just up, higher and higher runs
 Sordello A child barefoot and rosy. See ! the sun's
 On the square castle's inner-court's low wall
 Like the chine of some extinct animal
 Half turned to earth and flowers ; and through the
 haze

(Save where some slender patches of grey maize 860
 Are to be overleaped) that boy has crossed
 The whole hill-side of dew and powder-frost
 Matting the balm and mountain camomile.
 Up and up goes he, singing all the while
 Some unintelligible words to beat
 The lark, God's poet, swooning at his feet,
 So worsted is he at " the few fine locks
 " Stained like pale honey oozed from topmost rocks
 " Sun-blanch'd the livelong summer,"—all that's left

835. chance] step. 836. dared] ta'en. 857. low] green.
 858. extinct] fossil.

¹ Asolo, a favourite spot of Browning's, is about ten miles east of Bassano among the Italian Alps, and on the eastern edge of the Romano country.

Of the Goito lay ! And thus bereft,
 Sleep and forget, Sordello ! In effect
 He sleeps, the feverish poet—I suspect
 Not utterly companionless ; but, friends,
 Wake up ! The ghost's gone, and the story ends
 I'd fain hope, sweetly ; seeing, peri or ghoul,
 That spirits are conjectured fair or foul,
 Evil or good, judicious authors think,
 According as they vanish in a stink
 Or in a perfume. Friends, be frank ! ye snuff
 Civet, I warrant. Really ? Like enough !
 Merely the savour's rareness ; any nose
 May ravage with impunity a rose :
 Rife a musk-pod and 'twill ache like yours !
 I'd tell you that same pungency ensures
 An after-gust, but that were overbold.¹
 Who would has heard Sordello's story told.

870 Book VI

After-
 math

880

¹ That is, reading *Sordello* has been an unusual exercise, but one nevertheless that has its own peculiar flavour—not like any ordinary poem ; anybody can read the ordinary romance ; but if *Sordello* is an acquired taste, it is nevertheless one which we shall return to with pleasure.

APPENDIX

ADDITIONAL NOTE ON BOOK III., LL. 950-954.

THERE has been considerable divergence of opinion as to whom these lines refer. Dr Berdoe, in his *Cyclopædia*, refers the first three to Walter Savage Landor and the last two to Empedocles. Mr Duff, in his Exposition, refers them all to Æschylus, following Mr Alfred Forman. None of them, however, seem to have noticed the changes in the text which Browning made when he revised the poem for the 1863 edition, and which throw considerable light upon the matter. In the first edition the passage runs as follows:—

“ Nay, your’s, my friend,
Whose great verse blares unintermittent on,
Like *any* trumpeter at Marathon;
He’ll testify who, when Platæas grew scant,
Put up with Ætna for a stimulant.”

It is plain that two separate persons are here alluded to, one of whom is called up as a witness to Browning’s esteem for the other. Remembering the passage in the Introduction to Book i. (lines 20-70), when Browning calls up an imaginary audience (amongst whom he specifies Æschylus) to listen to his story, together with Browning’s early enthusiasm for Landor, and his admiration for Browning, and their common love of the Greek tragedies, it seems most reasonable to suppose that Landor and Æschylus are the two to whom reference is made. When, however, we turn to the text of 1863, we find it altered, and in such a way that only one person instead of two is referred to.

“ Yours, my patron friend,
Whose great verse blares unintermittent on,
Like *your own* trumpeter at Marathon;
You who Platæas and Salamis, being scant,
Put up with Ætna for a stimulant.”

The explanation of these changes would seem to be either that Browning forgot the allusion to Landor or decided to omit it for his own reasons, and altered the passage, so that it refers entirely to Æschylus. As the passage stands in the revised text, the claims of either Landor or Empedocles are remote beside that of Æschylus. Landor was certainly a patron friend, and Empedocles threw himself into Ætna, but Landor had nothing to do with Ætna, and I know of no connection between Browning and Empedocles. Whereas Æschylus went to Hiero, King of Syracuse, and is said to have written a play called *The Women of Ætna*, of which, no doubt, Ætna was "the stimulant" in the same sense as Plataea and Salamis were "the stimulants" for the *Persæ*. The alteration from "any trumpeter" to "your own trumpeter" further strengthens the claim of Æschylus. The former might be applied in a general sense to any poet, but the latter seems to locate it definitely with someone who had a close connection with the Battle of Marathon itself.

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Crennelled, i. 908. Worn unto holes, e.g. crenated, indented.

Crescentius, iv. 960.

Cresset, i. 315. A torch.

Cruce, vi. 300. Crucible, melting-pot.

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 " So sore
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O

Obsidion, v. 42. A kind of lava used for polishing.

O'er-toise, ii. 828. From Latin "tendere" to stretch; compare "poise" from "pendere" to hang.

Oliero, i. 140, 292. The monastery to which Ecelin retired.

Orpine, i. 658.—v. 282. Stone crop in the common species.

Osprey, i. 129, 168.—iv. 59. The sea eagle.

Ostrich, crest of Romano, iv. 65.

Otho, i. 198, 275.—ii. 912.—iv. 584.—v. 183.

Ounce, i. 167. A kind of leopard inhabiting N. Africa, Arabia, and the East.

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Paulician, ii. 865.

Pavis, i. 116.

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Perseus, ii. 211.

Peter the Hermit, v. 192. Preacher of the 1st Crusade.

Peter (Saint), i. 197. His proxy, *i.e.* the Pope.

Phanal, iv. 989. From the Greek verb to shine; a beacon.

Piombi, iii. 876.

Pistore (Bishop), ii. 336.

Plara, iii. 882, 897. An imaginary poet of Browning's.

Plataea, iii. 953. A battle fought by the Greeks against the Persians.

Platan, iii. 596.

Plectre, ii. 740. A metal instrument for playing on stringed instruments.

Podesta, i. 151.—iv. 535.

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Potiphar, iii. 823.

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Provence, i. 986.

Purle, i. 901. To embroider with flowers.

Pyropus stone, vi. 411. A translucent deep red gem allied to the garnet.

Pythons, i. 929.

Pythoess, v. 81. A priestess of the shrine of Apollo at Delphi.

Pyx, i. 591. A box.

R

Rathe-ripe, ii. 731. Early ripe, positive of "rather."

Raunce, vi. 781.

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Sempiternal, i. 353. Eternal in futurity ; having beginning but no end.

Shelley, apostrophe to, i. 60.

Sirvent, ii. 516, 686.

Sidney, Sir Philip, i. 69.

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Sordello—

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 Tinct, iii. 17. Dye or colour.
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 Toma, iv. 534.—v. 283.
 Trabea, v. 296. The purple robe of state worn by the Roman Consuls.
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V

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W

Weft, ii. 103. 1st Ed. curl.
 Writhen, i. 291. An old form of past part. of writhe; to deform with distortion (Johnson).
 Writhled, v. 718. Wrinkled.

X

Xanthus, iii. 1013.

Y

Yoland, i. 245. See Arpo.

Z

Zanze, iii. 879. An imaginary character of Browning's.
 Zin, iii. 817. A desert in Arabia traversed by the children of Israel in their wanderings.

For all words not explained see notes in the text.

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